

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE FOR MUSLIM VOLUNTEER WORKERS

WHEN MUSLIMS WORK TOGETHER



BASED ON A LECTURE SERIES BY:

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WHEN MUSLIMS WORK TOGETHER – NOUMAN ALI KHAN



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We express our gratitude to the following for their tremendous contributions:

Ustad Noman Ali Khan

For being a guide and mentor to so many Muslim volunteers and organizations around the globe and for producing such a beneficial lecture series

*Volunteers at
nakcollection.com*

For producing the original transcripts of the lecture series which have been edited, amended, reorganized and modified to form this book

FOREWORD



This book is based on a one-day seminar that was delivered by Ustadh Nouman Ali Khan (Founder of Bayyinah Institute, USA) at event organized by IANT (Islamic Association of North Texas) on November 10, 2012. Ustadh Nouman highlighted various aspects of Quranic guidance on being a part of any Islamic organization - whether as a leader or a community member. This seminar is a great Quranic orientation for any person who becomes a member in any religious organization – such as a masjid board, University MSA (Muslims Students Association), or any other religious formation. There are certain important fundamental principles that can massively impact the productivity of our collective Islamic work if not understood well, and vice versa. This series touches on those generally untouched but important aspects and lays down a very clear code of conduct for the Muslim volunteers in accordance with the guidance from the Quran and Sunnah.

The purpose of converting the lecture series into the book format is to provide a quick reference guide for the learners so that after listening to the lecture series or after reading the book once, they can come back to the book again and be able to quickly refresh the concepts covered in it. Content has been organized under chapters and headings in order to facilitate that.

Important Note:

It is to be noted that this book is not a hundred percent word to word transcript of the lecture series. In order to convert the content from speech to written form, certain sentences and words had to be modified or replaced, as considered necessary.

We make a sincere dua to Allah swt to accept this humble effort and make it a Sadaqa Jariyyah and source of forgiveness to everyone who has participated in the process.

Editorial Team, Australian Islamic Library

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CHAPTER 1: TYPES OF STRUGGLES



شَرَعَ لَكُم مِّنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّى بِهِ نُوحًا وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ أَنْ أَقِيمُوا الدِّينَ وَلَا تَتَفَرَّقُوا فِيهِ ۚ كَبُرَ عَلَى الْمُشْرِكِينَ مَا تَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَيْهِ ۗ اللَّهُ يَجْتَبِي إِلَيْهِ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي إِلَيْهِ مَن يُنِيبُ

He has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Noah and that which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad ﷺ], and what We enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus - to establish the religion and not be divided therein. Difficult for those who associate others with Allah is that to which you invite them. Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him]. (Quran 42:13)

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK?

The intention behind writing this book is to create a resource for Muslims who are involved in any kind of Islamic work, whether that be at a masjid, a school, a charity organisation, a student society like MSA, a youth group, or any other form of COLLECTIVISM¹.

What a large number of Muslims don't realise in present times is that the Quran does not only give us guidance regarding "individual" worship or "personal" matters, but it also provides the guidance related to ALL other aspects of our life; it also guides us regarding how to become a successful 'collective' being at the level of the community and communal works. So the guidance from Allah's book covers the efforts we have to do as individuals as well as the efforts we have to do as a community.

This book is compiled with an intention to provide a glimpse into guidance that the book of Allah contains for us in the matters related to our efforts as a community, with a hope that it will bring 'barakah' and blessing into our community's

¹ Collectivism refers to a group activity for a cause. Linguistically, it is defined as 'Collectivism is a cultural value that is characterized by emphasis on cohesiveness among individuals and prioritization of the group over self.' So, by its definition, the workers participating in a collective effort, in general, have to give preference to their Jama'ah or organization over themselves. This can take a number of shapes and forms.

efforts and voluntary works.

3 TYPES OF STRUGGLES

Let us first lay the conceptual framework upon which the structure of this book is established.

Human beings are essentially involved in various forms of struggle, and that struggle is on many levels. Following is an overview of three main types of struggles that we usually come across.

Struggle to survive:

The first type of struggle is to survive or to earn a living. Muslim or not, you have to get up and go out to earn and survive. Even the animals are involved in this type of struggle. The bird leaves its nest to find food for itself and its chicks, and so on.

Struggle for those who are close to us

Another type of struggle, which is above in level as compared to first type of struggle, occurs when your immediate needs or basic necessities are met; maybe it has to do with your family, your neighbours, your community, and so on. For example, you want to reduce crime in your neighbourhood; You want to make sure there are enough stop signs on the streets of your locality and you approach your councillor or county official

for these purposes. So, you become involved at a community level and you struggle for something more than just your own personal needs. Along these lines you may also have people with political concerns, like working for disadvantaged groups. This is something not just limited to Muslims but is also applicable to most humans, in general. If the basic needs are met and people have got some resources and time, those who wish to do something for often get involved in such forms of communal work.

Struggle towards a bigger cause or a belief

After this, there is another level of struggle. That is the struggle towards a cause! A belief! This may not be something physical or tangible (such as a cleaner neighbourhood or better schools); this may be hard to understand for many people. The people who decide to take on such a struggle have a belief in an idea or a cause or an ideology. For Muslims, this third type of struggle is the struggle for Islam. Our cause is that everyone should know about this beautiful religion and its true teachings. There could be someone equally passionate about Christianity or Judaism or Hinduism or Atheism. So they would want to propagate or spread those ideologies and religions, and would struggle to spread them in the world. Such struggles are not for any short-term tangible goods, but for a bigger cause or a belief or an idea. For many bearers of

such ideas, they may not see the fruits of that idea in their lifetime as the idea may be too big for even their own life-span.

In the non-Muslim sphere, you might have people struggling for justice or a better way of life, for example, the Enlightenment or the French Revolution if we take examples from history. There were the struggles against the Church for the cause of freedom, popular democracy; some wanted human beings to be 'sovereign' over their own fate as a community or as a government. Whether they saw it materialised in their lifetime or not, they were and are ready to fight for it. Even to the extreme extent of giving their life for it! It is that third level of struggle that people undertake.

To recap, the struggle that we come across or get involved in is at three levels:

1. At the level of the individual,
2. At the level of community for certain tangible goals
3. At the level of society for Intangible or abstract ideas, beliefs, and causes in a society.

STRUGGLE FROM ISLAMIC POINT OF VIEW

As a Muslim, we have to do this struggle or the Mujahadah at all three levels. Let us now ponder upon these three levels of struggles in our lives as Muslims.

In our struggle at individual level, we are fighting against our nafs, against Satan, against our laziness, our anger, our lack of self-control and other such enemies. These are the struggles we have to make with ourselves. We have to struggle with ourselves to become better in our ibadah (worship). Many supplications that we make in our daily life are about these personal struggles.

For example,

اللَّهُمَّ اَعِنِّي عَلَى ذِكْرِكَ وَشُكْرِكَ وَحُسْنِ عِبَادَتِكَ

“Oh Allah, aid me in your remembrance, your thankfulness, and in perfecting your worship.”

That's a struggle with your ego, nafs, or soul. It is very important to get hold of your own self first before you can make contribution elsewhere. If this battle is won, all subsequent battles become easier to manage.

Then we go a little bit past that and come to the point that your worries are not confined to yourself alone. You strive for for certain tangible outcomes such as a place where other Muslims can worship. So, the masajids get built. You find a need for the better education and nurturing of Muslim children. So, the Sunday schools and Islamic schools get built. You feel the compelling need for spreading the message of

Islam to others. So, the dawah organisations get created. You can see that there are many struggles that initially started at the individual level and then grew to the community level as the time progressed. They, in many cases, grow even further and aim toward more open-ended targets such as aiming to spread Islam throughout the country or even the whole world. When people get motivated to this level of struggle, they are not turned off when they don't immediately see the result of their effort. With their vision being set, their efforts become much more powerful and directed.

This goal of spreading Islam to all corners of the world cannot be considered a very tangible goal in the short-term. Those who rise up with this aim, accordingly, know that their work requires consistency and patience. It is an open-ended target. These people, therefore, do not get turned off by not seeing any tangible results in the short-term, if they carry the big vision and are sincere to their cause. It is enough for them that it is a worthwhile activity. Their high vision does not let them become tired after taking a few steps as opposed to those who stand with a smaller vision and get tired soon too.

From this we understand that, as a community, we cannot ignore one level of struggle and focus entirely on the other. We have to work on all these three levels simultaneously. We need to fix ourselves; we have to work to meet the needs of

the communities and countries we live in; and then we have to be worried about the whole humanity and do whatever best we can to spread the message of Islam to them.

With this in mind, let us now move on to some of the fundamental considerations and requirements for the Islamic volunteer work.

YOU ARE HELPING YOUR OWN SELF

One essential thing that every Islamic worker needs to understand at the very beginning is that any of these efforts that we make for others are, at the end of the day, more benefiting to ourselves than anyone else. They benefit us! It is possible that we may not be able to necessarily benefit anyone else because we are not capable of that! The Prophet ﷺ benefited the humanity more than any other human being, but Allah swt commanded him to say, 'I don't possess the power to benefit you nor the power to harm you.' Think about that. The Prophet ﷺ is more beneficial than any other human being and yet he is commanded to say, 'I don't possess the power to benefit you.' So, Allah swt is telling us that the benefit that has reached us from our Prophet ﷺ has not from him at his own will but it is from Allah swt. When the Prophet ﷺ wanted guidance for some people and Allah swt did not want that, He told him not to ask for their forgiveness.

So, as a believer, our attitude should be that whatever good I'm doing, I'm not benefiting anyone BUT myself . That's whom I am benefiting at the end of the day! When I give sadaqah, I benefit my own self! If I am helping out at the masjid, or at a school, or a charity organisation, I am helping my own self. If I am volunteering at an event, it is for my own benefit rather than the event organizers, attendees or anyone else. If I am trying to do the work of Dawah with an organization, I am trying to benefit my own self. If any benefit reaches anyone else, it is from Allah; I am not capable of doing that. That is the attitude one should seek to develop and maintain. In this attitude, the Muslims are unique as opposed to any other group of people who work for ideologies and bigger non-tangible goals.

INTERCONNECTIVITY BETWEEN THE THREE LEVELS OF STRUGGLE:

We need to understand that these three struggles, for yourself, for tangible goals in the community, and the greater struggle for the propagation for Islam, they are all interconnected or married to each other. You can't just be an activist who doesn't worry about himself. You have to be worried about yourself, your character and the state of your heart. Sometimes people get so active or involved in an activity or organisation that they don't have time to pray or worship the

way it is supposed to be. They begin to have a diminished role in struggle at one level and an inflated role in the struggle at another level. This is something that's not acceptable in our religion. Let's see how.

THE 'MINDING MY OWN BUSINESS' LIFESTYLE

What we are saying here is that my struggle at the individual level is connected to my struggle at the communal level; and that struggle is linked to my broader ideological struggle. So, they are all connected to each other in an inseparable fashion. How? Before we discuss about that further, we need to clear up one big misconception. Religion, generally in post-modern society in the West, and now increasingly in the east as well, is considered as something "personal". For example, in the US constitution, we have freedom of religion just like we have the freedom of speech, the freedom of choice and other 'freedoms'. The religious freedoms that we enjoy in this country are because religion here is regarded as a "personal matter". Nobody can stop me from praying and I can't stop someone from worshiping the devil if he chooses to do so. It's up to an individual to decide if he or she believes in God or not; it's their business and their choice. It is a free market place for ideas and beliefs and it's a personal thing! But in Islam, it is the total opposite.

What we learn from the Quran and Sunnah is that if you are a

Muslim, Islam is not just a personal business for you! Islam, by definition and by default, needs to be shared! Islam, by definition, seeks to benefit others too! If I am a believer in Islam, I can't say that my Islam is limited to myself and that I don't have to worry about anybody else except myself. So long as I am praying, so long as I am giving charity, and going to Hajj, so long as I'm fasting, I don't have to worry about anybody else. That is something our religion does not want us to do. At its core, it is concerned with others.

This responsibility or duty is mentioned in one of the shortest yet profound surahs of the Quran - Surah Al-Asr:

وَالْعَصْرِ
إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ
إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

By the time,

Verily Man is in loss,

Except such as have Faith, and do righteous deeds, and (join together) in the mutual teaching of Truth, and of Patience and steadfastness.

If Islam was just about you, the Surah would stop at the verse which says 'Except those who believe and do good deeds'. There should have been a full stop here. But there isn't. The

following verse says, 'They mutually enjoin the truth and mutually enjoin patience'.

Also, Allah says in surah Aal-e-Imran, 'You are the best community that has been raised up for mankind. You enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency; and you believe in Allah'. This clearly calls us toward necessary engagement with others in terms of sharing our religion and working for the greater good of mankind. It is something inherent in the very basis of our religion. It is not something that needs proving. The fact that this book is compiled, these lectures were delivered and you are reading it now have all stemmed from this responsibility given to us by Allah swt and our beloved Master Muhammad ﷺ.

There are people that could just be sitting at home and eating halal food, waiting for their next prayer, and thinking to themselves, 'My Islam is done, I'm not doing anything haram or wrong'. This, unfortunately, indicates a limited or a distorted understanding of Islam. This religion requires a struggle beyond ourselves. This realization is extremely important.

THE CHALLENGES OF CURRENT AGE AND TIME

Another important realization that we should have is that we have to understand the time in history that we are living in. Had we been writing this book fifty years ago, its contents and

discussions would have been very different, based on the reality of that time. The challenges we are facing as individuals and as an ummah are unique and particular to the times we are living in. For example, the transmission of anti-Islamic values through the mass media and many other things that we see around us were not there in the times passed by. It can even be said that as Ummah, we have never ever in our history faced the type of challenges that we are facing in the current epoch. And if we, especially the youth, fail to understand the nature of these threats and challenges, we are likely to harm the cause of Islam rather doing any good to it. The way we respond to challenges of current times, the communal efforts we choose to work and the methodology of our broader struggle for Islam have to align with the needs and requirements of present time in order for them to be effective.

Chapter Summary

This chapter begins with explaining the three levels of struggles that individuals take up. The significance of these levels of struggles is then explained from the Islamic perspective. After setting this foundation regarding why the struggle for Islam at various levels is required to be done, a need for balance between these three types of struggles is explained. It is also explained that when a person decides to follow the path of working for the cause of Islam, he should remember that he is not benefitting anyone else but his own self. It is the duty that he is required to fulfil.

CHAPTER 2: VALUING DIVERSITY



HOW TO DEAL WITH DIFFERENCES OF OPINION

We are living in a time when there are so many different efforts and so many different movements and so many different labels - all working under the label 'Islam'. There are so many diverse flavours or schools of thought - each presenting different opinions and considering their opinions to be THE ONLY true opinions!

To give a personal example, most of my adult life was spent in New York and I left that area only five years ago. So my exposure to Islam on a serious level began in NY. In that area and many other places in the world, depending on which masjid you go to, you see a lot of different brands within Islam. These brands, at times, are completely different from the others. You get exposed to different ways of thinking about

Islam. I am neither going to label any groups and movements nor I am talking about outside of orthodox Islam. I am talking about mainstream Sunni Islam. Even within that, you have a lot of variety and differences of opinion. As a young person, I was very impressionable and when I used to get exposed to a particular type of school of thought, I used to think that “this seems to be THE right one”. But when I used to come across another version, I thought that, maybe, is the REAL one! Maybe there is something wrong with the previous one.

I kept experimenting. But one thing came very clear and obvious to me at the end of all this experimental experience – ‘Islam’ and ‘the struggle for Islam’ is not one thing. It will never be owned by a single group. It cannot be. That time is over. It’s long gone. That time was the time of the Prophet ﷺ when Islam was understood in a uniform manner; everybody had more or less exactly the same understanding on every issue. Whenever, a difference of opinion arose, they had the messenger of Allah ﷺ with them; they could take it back to the Prophet ﷺ and he could answer them immediately.

We now have the Quran and the Sunnah. But have there been differences of opinion on interpretation on the Quran and the Sunnah? Yes. Are there going to be legitimate differences of opinion amongst us? Yes, of course. Are there going to be a different variety of Muslims? Absolutely.

Response to differences of opinions:

Now there are two attitudes you can take in this situation.

One of them says that "the opinion, version, group or scholars that I am holding on to or following are correct and everybody else is not only wrong, but deviant and corrupt; they are going to the hell fire. So let us stay away from them. Don't go near them and don't listen to them; they will mislead you and corrupt you. What WE have is the right Islam. All the others are wrong". What have been the results of this kind of attitude? Further divisions and in-fighting!

In fact those groups which start making such claims usually end up splitting into sub-sects themselves, leading to further sub-divisions of an already divided entity. One thing we all need to understand is that the first generation of Muslims and a majority of the scholars throughout the Islamic history NEVER went around claiming to be the only ones with the whole truth and condemning everyone else to hell. They were too humble to make such claims. But today we have people who cannot read but a line, at best, in Arabic who are going around pronouncing fatwas of deviancy and heresy on a majority of the ummah and the scholars of the past and present.

At the end of the day, the maturer your understanding of Islam gets, the more you realize that the work for Islam is not going

to be owned by a single group, community, jamaat, scholar or a particular school of thought. It is not going to happen. That's not practically possible.

Differences of opinion can be legitimate and need to be taken that way in a positive sense. It is beyond the scope of this book to explain the reasons for that and its legitimate standing. Even companions used to have difference of opinion in some matters. They still used to love each other, helped and supported each other in religious and personal endeavours. Why can't we follow their example and do the same?

Recently I had the chance to go to hajj. That is the place to make you realise the great diversity we have in Islam. This blessed journey makes you realise that how widely different Muslims can be. You can also observe this in countries like the U.S and other Western countries. Even in cities like Dallas, you are going to find an incredible diversity among Muslims. This is how God has made us – Diverse.

'I DON'T AGREE BUT I STILL LOVE YOU' – RESPECT ALL THE GOOD WORK

The reason I am bringing this discussion up and one of the things I want to remind myself and hopefully instil in you is to have respect for good work.

It doesn't matter whether it's coming from people that are exactly like you or from Muslims that aren't exactly the same as you. So long as it is a good work, it should be respected. It should even be supported. It shouldn't be the case that we just support, aid or agree with people that are exactly like us. That's again impractical and against the basic teachings of our religion. There are scholars that I have tremendous respect for, but at the same time I can't get myself to agree to some of their positions. I just can't and I have told them, 'I can't agree with you on this one point but I still love you to bits.' And when they do good things or start good projects, I wholeheartedly support them. It's not that I disagree with one thing and that lends me to say I am not going to support this person or group because there's one thing they said which I don't agree with.

I ask you, which other human being are you going to agree with a one hundred percent? Do you agree with your wife 100%? Does your wife agree with you on everything? Do your children agree with you a hundred percent on everything? How's that possible? So if we've become idealistic that we are not going to work with someone unless we are exactly on the same page on every issue, then it will be impossible for us to work with each other and establish positive relationships.

Even the companions had differences of opinion amongst

themselves, even in the interpretation of the Quran on occasions. There would be an ayah, which in the opinion of Ibn Abbass (R.A), would mean one thing and in the opinion of another companion e.g. Abdullah ibn Masud, would mean something else. But they loved and respected each other. So that's something that we have to instil into ourselves, inshaAllah.

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

We have discussed about the diversity of the ummah and how we have to respect different kinds of diversities. Let us know ponder a little bit over a verse Surah Al-Maida, which was one of the last Surahs to be revealed.

In the beginning of Sura Maida (verse 2), Allah told us,

وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ ۖ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

Help one another in furthering virtue and God-consciousness, and do not help one another in furthering evil and enmity (Quran 5:2)

Above is a simple translation of the ayah. But the ayah says much more than this. Let's elaborate some of that in the coming sections.

Ta'awan is commonly translated as 'to cooperate'. So the

ayah says cooperate in piety. That's a rough translation. Ta'awan in Arabic language comes from Aown which means aid, a serious aid - not like just any small help but serious or desperate help. That's the same word as the one used in Surah Fatiha, when we say

إِيَّاكَ تَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

It is from the same root aowan.

So, "tawanoo" means seriously helping one another, or helping each other a lot, on all that is "al-birr".

Al-birr means all effort that is towards good. Here, Allah did not even specify which good deeds. He just says "al-birr". Birr is probably the most comprehensive word in the Arabic language for goodness. It means ANYTHING good. So if any good is happening, be a part of it. This is what this ayah demands from those who believe.

REALIZE THE DIVERSITY

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that there isn't anything as 'the only right cause' or 'the only good and most perfect project' in Islam. In fact the community works and right causes and projects are as diverse as our communities are. World of Islam is diverse and so are our needs. No single organization can encompass all of this. For example,

educating true values of Islam to our children is one noble project. But within this umbrella project, there can be a hundred smaller projects, e.g. how to educate them in the Quran, how to educate them in history, how to educate them in manners, in the sciences, and so on. Each of these are distinct individual projects. So, when we talk about establishing a community counselling, it can have a number of branches or sub-projects, such as counselling for teenagers, counselling for middle schoolers, counselling for married couples, counselling for seniors, and so on. We can start with any useful individual projects, reflect on it, scale it up, and excel on. In this, we should all be each other's supporters rather than rivals or even competitors (in a negative manner).

HOW CAN 'I' CONTRIBUTE?

The next question that we have to ask ourselves is that "how can 'I' contribute? What can 'I' serve with? What role can 'I' play? Maybe 'I' need to start something new! Maybe something already exists and 'I' can support it".

Take, for example, the matter of dawah or propagation of Islam. It is not a single thing or project idea but a 1000 things. There are efforts happening on various specific forms of dawah. For example, brother Mojahid Fletcher is doing dawah in the Spanish community. That is a very particular project and I respect that a lot because that's something

which is very much needed. But that is one area. There are others, who have dedicated their lives to taking message of Islam to Christians and Hindus and so on and so forth. Some work face to face, some run virtual campaigns, some deal with print media and others with other modes of communication. Our beloved Prophet ﷺ would send Muslims of particular tribes to their respective tribes (e.g a Yemeni Sahabi to tribes in Yemen) for dawah. What I derive from that is that we need to understand our own position.

Example of how you talk to career counsellor:

We need to ask ourselves, 'Where am I going to contribute? Just consider an analogy of a situation how people go to a counsellor and ask, 'What career should I go into? I am good at math, I like science, I hate art, etc. So, what should I do?'

The counsellor may reply, 'Well you should be an accountant, or you should be into sales, or you should be into this or that.'

Similarly you and I should think about counselling ourselves. We should try to know and utilise our talents, knowledge, experience, and education to benefit Islam in any way, shape or form that we can. And it should take into consideration our particular interests and skill-sets. Ask yourself about the task, job or project that motivates you, that you have got a passion for. Do that!! Seek counselling from the community members

regarding this. Assess the need and work on it.

BE PASSIONATE

Islamic work is something you should feel passionate about. It should not be done as grunt work i.e. you are doing it because you have been asked to do it. You should feel pride in it and be passionate. You should do it because you love it! You were made for it! And that's what you have to find for yourself. So when like minds come together and cooperate with each other, that is epitomizing 'cooperate in al-birr, goodness.'

REMINDING EACH OTHER OF TAQWA

When we look at the ayah under consideration, Allah swt not only talks about cooperating in al-birr, but also in al-taqwa. There is a subtle wisdom behind placement of this word 'taqwa' in this ayah after al-birr. The essence of 'taqwa' is protecting one's self. So essentially it is an individual thing. The Prophet ﷺ said, *At-Taqwa Haa Hunna* pointing to his heart i.e. Taqwa is something that resides in a person's heart. Nobody can look inside your heart and see what is in there. On one hand, the above ayah began talking about us cooperating with each other in collective work towards good – Al-Birr. On the other hand, it is immediately followed it up by saying that make sure you cooperate in instilling taqwa in each other also. Think on that, Why?

Here is the reason. Just because you are doing good work, does not mean or guarantee that you have taqwa as well. So remind each other during an event or a conference, 'Hey, it's time for salah.' Or 'We need to recite more Quran.' Remind each other about not backbiting or making fun of other Muslims. Remind each other of how the prayers are going. Are we offering them in jama'ah or not, and so on. We have to remind each other of these things.

The spiritual element in our work is embedded inside the process of cooperating. So we shouldn't just become volunteers at an MSA (Muslim Students Association) or YC (Youth Club) or another religious organization posting out flyers, or sending the emails or updating the facebook pages and sending the tweets ONLY. At the end of all that, it is essential that we should also remind each other, 'Hey, we should pray some extra nawafil for the convention so that Allah bless it and nothing untoward or bad happens, and May Allah accepts all this effort.' That is taqwa. So, we help each other in Al-birr and taqwa.

WHEN SHOULD WE NOT COOPERATE?

The next part of the verse says, وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ , The original word in Arabic is 'tatawanoo' and one 'ta' is removed. It means 'do not cooperate in sins irrespective of how small that cooperation is'.

Now the order of command here is reverse to what was said about cooperation in al-birr and taqwa. In that case, cooperating the goodness was mentioned first and taqwa or the inner spiritual dimension was mentioned later on. But in this part of the verse, when we are being told, firstly, about not cooperating in what is spiritually wrong or sin or ithm (إثم). So, we are not supposed to cooperate with each other in the matters of sin; this is the first requirement. Someone may suggest, 'Hey the convention is over, Wanna go and grab a sheisha? Want to go and hang out later, want to grab a movie, do this that and the other.'" The verse says, 'Don't cooperate with each other in sins.' That is, don't let that happen to you. When people are together, the collective responsibility also goes down. Young people can testify to that. When young guys are together and one of them says, 'Hey man, lets go and watch a movie,' then even if one of you is thinking, 'this doesn't seem such a good idea while we are doing this Islamic volunteer work', you just tag along and don't feel like guilty. When this happens, there's a collective dropping of guilt!

In psychological terms, this concept is called "Groupthink". This is a term first used in 1972 by social psychologist Irving L. Janis. It refers to a psychological phenomenon in which people strive for consensus within a group. In many cases, people will set aside their own personal beliefs or adopt the

opinion of the rest of the group. People who are opposed to the decisions or overriding opinion of the group as a whole frequently remain quiet, preferring to keep the peace rather than disrupt the uniformity of the crowd.

Just the opposite is true too. When there's a bunch of people and one or some of them says, 'Hey lets go to the masjid and pray.' Everybody will go. It is easier to encourage a group to do good and vice versa as compared to individuals. So, now reflect on the ayah again in this context. Allah says, 'Make sure you cooperate with each other in good things and make sure you don't cooperate in bad things,' because it is very easy for the entire group to cooperate in sin.

What happens when young people get together and talk too much? They start making fun of each other and then they start back-biting each other. They start making inappropriate remarks about each other and this discussion turns bad really fast. For example, you go to a dinner and initially the conversation starts off productively, but eventually it turns into a really bad or sinful conversation which goes on for hours. This is *ithm* or sin. That makes our hearts dirty.

When you are involved in a youth group, or a group at your masjid or any other project, and you guys get together, then it is easy to bash the other youth groups or jamaats. 'Oh we schooled them this time. Our programme was so much bigger

and better. Those guys don't even know how to organise an event.” It is so tempting to talk like that, but it falls under 'ithm', builds animosity, and is to be strongly discouraged and avoided.

When your heart becomes dirty with sin, it creates the opposite of cooperation - discord or division. This is no more called 'co-operation' but 'adwaan' or 'animosity'.

WHAT IS A CULT?

We have to be cautious of this group behaviour as it gradually starts turning into a cult. That's one of the great dangers of mis-doing Islamic work.

Following are some characteristics of cults. It is a quick guide to question ourselves if we are becoming a cult or we are doing a sincere and honest effort to establish the deen of Allah. These are presented at various forums by Dr. Ingrid Mattson to warn people about formation of such cults².

Cults is a personality centred group which thinks that it is correct and others are totally worthless. (On contrary, our beloved Prophet ﷺ specifically asked us to avoid this 'us' vs

² Following link can be referred to watch video advice:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGb0pVIQ0Nk>

(Alternatively, search for: “Difference between Cult and Community Noman Ali Khan” on youtube.com)

‘them’ mentality within Muslims. Prophet ﷺ said: “A Muslim is the brother of another Muslim, so he should not oppress him, forsake him, or despise him.” And “It is sufficient evil for a Muslim that he should look down upon his brother. The life, wealth, and honour of a Muslim are inviolable by another Muslim.” [Sahih Muslim]”

Cult group has a polarized us-versus-them mentality, which may cause conflict with the wider society. Islamic groups need to avoid this and be inclusive towards all Muslims irrespective of race, color, age and other backgrounds - ONLY for the sake of Allah.

Cults discourage questioning and want everyone to be exactly the same. Islam, on the other hand, encourages questioning and sahaba used to question each other in order to verify their understanding on various issues. So should be the behaviour of Islamic groups. They should have a system of upward, downward and parallel accountability.

Cults want their members to think exactly the same way, do exactly the same things and look the same too. Islamic groups, on contrary, should be able to accept legitimate differences. Difference of opinion on minor issues should not divide us. Difference in the fiqh that we follow should not become a source of division within us. Even companions used to have different opinions on various matters and these

difference opinions were endorsed as true by prophet ﷺ.

RESPECTING ALL ISLAMIC EFFORTS

I would like to come back to the point that I started off with, i.e. all Islamic efforts have to be respected. Let me share a recent example. I got a call from a brother in Australia whom I previously met at an ISNA conference. He was here to see how we hold conventions because they are trying to do Islamic work in Australia. He said that he was interested in our Arabic programme, but he was very hesitant to ask us for its curriculum. He shyly said that to me that 'I didn't have to share the tips or the syllabus if I thought they were propriety of Bayyinah etc.' I said, 'Bro, take the curriculum! I can't come to Australia. Take it and use it; go do it! Do whatever you can.' So if there's a youth group here and another in Plano and in Fort Irving, all the better. The more the merrier, as they say. That's a really needed resource. So, this is the golden rule for working collectively as Muslims. We have to cooperate in all good things. Period. We have to forget our labels, or that we have to further or promote one particular organisation or the jamaat only. Our primary loyalty is not to organisations but to the work of the deen. That's it. Allah will not ask us under which banner did you do your work. Allah will not ask, 'which logo did you put on the flyer?' We are going to be asked on our intentions, sincerity and the openness with which we worked

with others. If we get so hung up on personalities, labels, logos, names of our brands and so on, then we are definitely creating a culture of animosity and division. We are creating a competition which is unhealthy and amongst our own selves. This is like creating unnecessary division. Why is this happening? Why is that happening? You start seeing your effort as something that's competing with other efforts for the same causes – spreading the final true religion of God. This is not the direction Islamic work should go in! This is not how healthy communities flourish! If we are engaged in such thoughts, we should definitely stop, reflect and re-align our priorities.

MANY BUILDERS ONE BUILDING

Surah Shuraa commands us to establish the deen and not be divided in it. Establishing the deen is not 'one' struggle. It's a million struggles and each one of them is part of a bigger effort.

The establishment of the deen can be compared to constructing a building. A building is made up of bricks. Everybody is working on one brick or another. So don't think that other bricks are not part of establishing the deen. Your effort and every other effort is part of a bigger picture or project. You may not see the full building yet. But, the more the people are at work, the more would be the pace of work.

Someone may be handling this room; the other is handling the other room; and further the establishment of the deen is going on. This is how it progresses, slowly and gradually.

Even Allah himself gives the example of Islam as a tree. Let us ponder upon this. Does a tree grow all of a sudden? No. It takes a long time; it takes years. The roots have to go deep. What about branches? Do they spread in the same direction or different directions? They don't go in one direction! They spread on all sides. That's the diversity of our Ummah. And each one of those directions has to be respected as long as it is not in the realm of sin.

"The Believers, men and women, are protectors of one of another: they enjoin the ma`roof (all that is good), and forbid the munkar (all that is evil): they observe regular prayers, pay Zakat, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is Most Exalted in power, All Wise."
[9:71]

Chapter Summary

The chapter explains that the struggle for Islam is not 'one' thing that only one particular organization is doing or can do. Rather, it is like making a building. A number of people are working towards building it. Some are bringing bricks; some are preparing cement; some are taking care of the workers and their morale; some are bringing the materials and so on. Everyone is playing a role. We should accordingly respect all Islamic work. Wherever we can support each other, we should. There should be no negative competition or undermining each other among the Muslim organizations and religious workers. We all should be one.

It is also explained that each of the Islamic projects can have a number of sub-projects. We should choose whatever interests us the most and whatever appears to us as most value-adding according to our given situation and circumstances. Whatever we choose, we should dedicate ourselves to that, be passionate about it and aim for excellence.

CHAPTER 3: MOTIVATION



شَرَعَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّى بِهِ نُوحًا وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى وَعِيسَى أَنْ أَقِيمُوا الدِّينَ وَلَا تَتَفَرَّقُوا فِيهِ ۚ كَبُرَ عَلَى الْمُشْرِكِينَ مَا تَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَيْهِ ۗ اللَّهُ يَجْتَبِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يُنِيبُ

وَمَا تَفَرَّقُوا إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَعْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ وَلَوْلَا كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ مِنْ رَبِّكَ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى لَفُضِّي بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُورِثُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِنْهُ مُرِيبٍ

فَلِذَلِكَ فَادَعُ ۖ وَاسْتَقِمْ كَمَا أُمِرْتَ ۖ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ ۚ وَقُلْ آمَنْتُ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنْ كِتَابٍ ۚ وَأُمِرْتُ لِأَعْدِلَ بَيْنَكُمُ ۚ اللَّهُ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ لَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ لَا حُجَّةَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمُ ۚ اللَّهُ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا ۖ وَاللَّهُ الْمَصِيرُ

He has ordained for you the same Deen (way of life - Islam) which He enjoined on Nuh - and which We have revealed to you O Muhammad - and which We enjoined on Ibrahim and Musa (Moses) and Isa (Jesus): "Establish the Deen of Al-Islam and make no division (sects) in it." Intolerable for the mushrikin is that to which you O Muhammad call them. Allah chooses for His service whom He wills, and guides to His Way only those who turn to Him in repentance.

And they were not divided until after the knowledge came unto them, through rivalry among themselves; and had it not been for a Word that had already gone forth from thy Lord for an appointed term, it surely had been judged between them. And those who were made to inherit the Scripture after them are verily in hopeless doubt concerning it.

So for that reason, invite them [to the true Deen] and stay firm on the Right Way as you are commanded and do not follow their vain desires. Tell them: "I believe in whatever Allah has revealed from the Book and I am commanded to do justice between you. Allah is Our Rabb and your Rabb. We are responsible for Our deeds and you for yours. Let there be no dispute among us. Allah will bring us all together on the Day of Judgement

and decide as to who is right and who is wrong. Towards Him lies the goal.

(Quran 42:13-15)

A LESSON OF MOTIVATION FROM THE SUNNAH

We will now discuss about what should motivate you and me to volunteer. What should motivate us to do this work? I'm going to take a passage from Surah Shuraa and discuss how it instructs us about establishing Allah's deen.

The Prophet ﷺ had basically three major audiences besides the Muslims:

- The Mushrikoon, i.e.. the idol worshippers of Makkah,
- Jewish tribes, and
- Christian communities.

Both of the last two groups were called the Ahl-ul kitab in the Quran. Prophet ﷺ was making efforts to communicate the message of Islam to all these three groups. There were hordes of people around the messenger ﷺ that were discouraging him from this work. All of us know the effect discouragement can have on a person when people discourage a productive activity you are doing by saying things like 'Why are you even bothering', 'What's the point in that?' 'You are wasting your time', and so on and so forth. When you hear that over and

over again, it can have a detrimental effect on your motivation. It can wear down your motivation. That's just a human thing.

With regards the Prophet ﷺ, it was his own family members and elders, who were at the forefront to discourage and de-rail the effort. It were also the knowledgeable people of the Jews and Christians that were becoming a source of discouragement.

But in the verses I am about to share with you, the discouragement does not seem to be coming from them; rather one might think that it is coming from Allah swt Himself. He says, 'it's too big a deal for the people of shirk to accept what you are calling them to. It is too heavy for them'. Now if somebody else was telling the Prophet ﷺ, he might not be demotivated because his high stature is too high and honourable to be bothered about that. But who is saying it to him here? It is Allah Himself. Allah is saying to him 'It's too hard for them to accept what you are calling them to.'

كَبُرَ عَلَى الْمُشْرِكِينَ مَا تَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَيْهِ

Difficult for those who associate others with Allah is that to which you invite them... (Quran 42: 13)

But the next part of the ayah answers him.

اللَّهُ يَجْتَبِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يُنِيبُ

... Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him] (Quran 42: 13)

Allah is the one who selects towards him who he wants! And He guides towards him who turns to him! If we analyze this a little bit, the first apparent de-motivation is that the people of shirk have no experience with the book. They have no previous prophets. They have no knowledge about the akhirah or the hereafter. All of this is new for them. So it is too hard for them to accept the message of Islam.

So, now the Prophet's ﷺ hopes turn toward the people that have knowledge and there were prophets sent to them along with the books - the Jews and Christians. Supposedly they are a better hope because they have knowledge. The next verse says,

وَمَا تَفَرَّقُوا إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ

'And they did not become divided until after knowledge had come to them'.

So, even knowledge was not able to bring them to truth. On contrary, knowledge itself became the reason for them rejecting the truth as they used it as a means of 'power', and

as a mean to further their ends or worldly goals. Knowledge to them was a weapon or tool and when they owned it they had control and authority. They did not want to transfer that authority to others by transferring them the knowledge.

Before moving further, let us discuss an important lesson regarding knowledge and how it is supposed to be used and then we will come back to the passage under discussion again.

DUAL NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE:

The knowledge has a dual nature when it comes to collective Islamic work such as Dawah. This is one of the major areas of Islamic work and it does require knowledge.

Using knowledge as a source of power

You can't be teaching somebody if you don't have knowledge yourself. Let us discuss an example to understand the dual nature of knowledge that we are talking about.

Suppose, there is a person who has knowledge, he is teaching, he has a following and there are people listening to him; and somebody else comes along and apparently, they have more knowledge than you him. With all this, his audience has started to slip away. And he is wondering "what's happening? That guy took all my crowd! So, maybe, I should

prove to people with my knowledge that the guy they are looking forward to, is really no good and they should really stay with me". Now this knowledgeable person, who is supposed to be sharing knowledge for the sake of Allah, is now using that knowledge as a weapon to hold onto his market-share, if I put it crudely. It seems like it is a commercial and materialistic exercise.

We need to understand that the knowledge of the Torah and Injeel at the time of the Prophet ﷺ were made exclusive and classified information by their keepers. Not 'any' Christian or Jew knew about the Bible or the Torah. Only the scholars of these faiths knew about these books. Their philosophy was that 'if you want to know about your religion, better come to us'. So, in such context, Prophet ﷺ comes along and he's making the knowledge of Allah's book available to everybody. He is challenging the status quo and he is teaching the book to every companion of his and anyone who wants to understand his noble message. His sunnah is to spread the knowledge and not confine it.

Manipulating others because of one's knowledge

The other thing about knowledge is that it can also be misused if there are mal-intentions. For example, let us suppose you have a problem with your car and you go to a mechanic. He has come to know that you know nothing about cars. Problem

to your solution was a simple oil change and he says to you that, 'you need a new fan belt, and your gearbox is also breathing its last and needs replacement. Your engine is weak and the list goes on and on. Is there any way to find out if he is lying or telling the truth? No. You have to trust him because you don't know and he knows. He can make hell lot of money from your ignorance.

So, when knowledge is in the hands of a one or two or a few, is there a possibility that they can use it to take advantage of others people? Certainly.

But, if I have reasonable knowledge about cars, I can challenge the mechanic and ask "what are you talking about? Show me the fan belt?" And then the mechanic is exposed.

Knowledge as a source of division rather than unity

Now, What about the leadership of the Jews and Christians. Were they not using knowledge for their advantage? Allah mentions this in following verse:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا التَّوْرَةَ فِيهَا هُدًى وَنُورٌ يَحْكُمُ بِهَا النَّبِيُّونَ الَّذِينَ أَسْلَمُوا لِلَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالرَّبَّاتِيُّونَ وَالْأَحْبَارُ بِمَا اسْتُحْفِظُوا مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ وَكَانُوا عَلَيْهِ شُهَدَاءَ ۚ فَلَا تَخْشَوُا النَّاسَ وَاخْشَوْنِي وَلَا تَشْتَرُوا بِآيَاتِي ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا ۚ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

Indeed We revealed the Taurat to Moses, in which there is guidance and light: By its laws, all the Prophets, who were Muslims, judged those who call themselves Jews and so did the rabbis and jurists of law (from the early believers of those prophets). They were entrusted the protection of Allah's Book and they themselves were witnesses. Have no fear of people; fear Me, and do not sell My revelations for a petty price: those who do not judge by the law which Allah has revealed, are indeed kafirs (unbelievers). (Quran 5:44)

They were using the knowledge as a source of manipulation and for a petty price. So, they did not want this knowledge to be taken away from them; they used that knowledge to keep the divisions in place as it was through those divisions that they benefited.

Does this phenomenon exist today in the Muslim ummah too? Do you find people using knowledge, Islamic Knowledge, to hold onto to a "market share" and to nullify everybody else's efforts and to literally turn the knowledge of Islam into a cultish industry? Don't we see people around us whose core effort is to increase the population of their own school of thought or sect nullifying any good work that other Muslims may be involved with?

The Prophet ﷺ hopes about apparently "the people of knowledge" (Jews and Christians), were that it should be easy

for them to accept the truth. But Allah says, it's actually because of their knowledge that they disagree with each other, out of the urge to rebel against each other.

They used that knowledge as a means of making themselves more arrogant. Knowledge is supposed to make you humble. The end of Surah Isra deals with exactly that. But in their case, their knowledge made them more arrogant. They didn't want to be put down. Why would they accept the supremacy of an Arab messenger, if at all?

MOTIVATION OR DEMOTIVATION?

After this brief discussion on the dual nature of knowledge, let us come back to the passage that we were discussing.

Summarizing the above, we see that apparently there are three big demoralization factors:

1. Mushrikoon (pagans of Makkah) are not going to accept the truth,
2. Those with knowledge, i.e. Jew and Christians, used their knowledge for the exact opposite purposes than what they were supposed to. Instead of coming to guidance, they used that knowledge to further their arrogance.
3. The Prophet ﷺ is thinking about them just like he thought about the people of Taif, 'If they can't become

believers , who can? Their children!' But look at what Allah says next: And if not for a word that preceded from your Lord [postponing the penalty] until a specified time, it would have been concluded between them. And indeed, those who were granted inheritance of the Scripture after them are, concerning it, in disquieting doubt. So, the next generation was doubtful too.

So, he has got three levels of problems; the mushrikoon will not accept, the people of the book have knowledge but they use it for corruption and not for guidance, and their future generations are riddled with doubt too. Problem after problem after problem!

Some of you would be thinking that this section was about motivation. But so far we are only discussing the demotivational factors. Hold on a little and you will know why.

MOTIVATION AMIDST ADVERSITY

One of the most remarkable verses on this subject is the following. These words contain a world inside them. Allah says,

فَلِذَلِكَ فَادْعُ

‘Then for that reason invite,’

What is the Prophet's ﷺ job at the end of the day? Inviting people! That's his job. Allah says that, I have listed before you three major, major, problems with the audience you have in front of you. These are enough for anybody else to say that there is no point to invite them, no purpose! Allah tells the Prophet ﷺ that because these problems are so major, that is why YOU have to invite them and that is why I chose YOU ﷺ!

This is not just any man's job. If the problems were small, it wouldn't need the greatest messenger of all humanity. It is because these problems are so big, you are needed. "Falidhalik fadoo".

What is the motivation given to the Prophet ﷺ here? The motivation given isn't, 'Oh your path is going to be easy, they are going to accept what you say right away, don't worry about it'. No! That's not how he has been given the motivation. The motivation to him is that 'these are the toughest crowds anybody has ever got and you will deal with them directly'. Some of the previous prophets dealt with the mushrikoon; some dealt with the people of the book; one dealt with one problem; the other with another problem. Some dealt with the ignorant; some dealt with the arrogant; and some dealt with the knowledgeable. Isa (A.S.) dealt with the people of the book. Zakariya (A.S.) dealt with the people of the book. But this Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had to deal with

everybody and the worst of all, he had to deal with them directly. And Allah swt says, 'That's why YOU have been chosen!'

ARE OUR PROBLEMS TOO BIG?

So what am I telling you and myself? If you look around, this is coming back to us! When Muslims get together for dinner, Eid, parties, tea and so on and so forth, what do we discuss? Problems! We love discussing problems! We are worried about what the government of a particular country is doing; what are the next plans of Jews, how the politicians are wrong and so on. We love discussing problems. And you know, some of us are seasoned problem experts. We have spent our entire life discussing problems. Yes, there are huge problems. But Allah decided that you and I will be alive in this era and time around all those problems. In the same way every generation of Muslims which Allah raised saw problems around them. Yes, they did. Allah raises generations of Muslims that He knows are qualified to solve the problems. It is because of those problems that you and I exist. Because these problems have to be solved, you and I have been given air to breathe and food to eat. That's why we are here. Have courage to accept this. 'Stand firm as you have been commanded'.

Don't buckle because you see problems. Don't follow their empty desires. Don't be demoralised because all your

opponents want is for you not to be motivated! So you should stop worrying about this.

'And tell them, I've been commanded, I've come to believe in whatever Allah revealed in his book.'

To you are your works and to us are our works.

WE ARE ALL HERE WITH A MISSION

Allah revealed that he charged me with this mission and I have to invite. So I'll invite, whether someone listens or not. I am going to do what I am going to do. This is what Quran is saying, 'We have our deeds and you have your deeds.' That means you can keep doing all the evil deeds you want. You can keep sending trillions of dollars on your propaganda, go ahead. We are going to do whatever we are going to do. We are not going to give up. That's **لَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ**, 'To you your works, and to us our works.' You do what you are going to do, you can call on all the forces of shaytan and do whatever you want, we will do our work. That's the stand of the Muslim. That's the stand he takes. That's the motivation for us to do volunteering for Islamic work!

PROBLEMS ARE THERE TO MAKE US STRONGER:

The point, I hope, I am getting across to all of you is that, it is because of these problems that Allah chose this ummah. The

problems around us shouldn't be a reason for us to complain or become passive or inactive or withdrawn.

The problems around us are supposed to get us to roll up our sleeves and buckle our belts and get us to work for a serious effort. The problems should make us more serious. 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going.'

We all come across situations that can make us get really depressed. We see poverty, ignorance, carefree attitude and what not. But it all depends on how you perceive it. You don't have to get depressed. You can come back with more resolve to do more work to improve the situation. That means, we are not doing enough work and more work needs to get done. Allah would never leave us hopeless. He will never leave us without his aid. If we were willing to do his work, things will change. The 'barakah' from Allah will come. That's what we have to believe in. That's the motivation you and I share.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a motivation boost for the Muslim volunteer workers. Many people give up volunteer work based on the problems they face while doing it. What they don't realize is that these problems are there to make us stronger. It was because of these problems that Allah swt chose you and me to live in this time and age. We have been blessed with the capabilities to play our role for the cause of Islam. Our capabilities are not to be wasted on unproductive and unworthy things. We should use our talents for the purpose of spreading our deen. Our energies have to be channelized and focussed towards this goal.

CHAPTER 4: ORGANIZATIONALS SETUPS



WHICH ORGANIZATION TO SUPPORT?

Another important thing to realise is that, at the end of the day, we are going to work through organisations. That's just how human societies are organised. You are going to work through a masjid or a national organisation or a madressa or a school or whatever. You are going to work through one of those channels for the sake of the deen. In most cases, you are not going to work by yourself; you are going to work through some collective initiative. But you make dua at the end (Allahu yajmauna bainana) , 'Allah make union between all of us.'

Some Muslims prematurely say, "There are so many Muslim organisations and Islamic societies, why can't we just have one Muslim organisation?". I said at the beginning, that it is not the way Islam works. There's no one single true effort. There's

going to be thousands of efforts and they all have to be respected so long as they are addressing something unique, for the sake of Allah and with sincerity.

STARTING A NEW EFFORT:

If you are going to start an effort, an organisation or something, be my guest, do it. All the best to you. Just make sure you don't start something in competition to something else. It should not be aimed at disrupting other good efforts. There is strength in 'jamiat' (Collectiveness) for individuals as well as organizations. If there is already a sincere effort going on for a particular cause, put your energies to strengthen that, rather than weakening it with undue competition. You should start something because there is a need which isn't being addressed and you feel that it should be addressed. That's when you have the need to start a new organisation. It is not because, 'Those guys did it and they're pretty successful, so I'll start something just like it so I can be successful too.' No, that's making unhealthy competition. Healthy competition is in good deeds, not in undercutting good efforts of others.

Because, at the end of the day, Muslims are a minority in many countries. Even where they are in a majority, the practicing Muslims are still a minority or under attack from the secularist Muslims. We have a relatively small population in the US, UK, Australia etc. This means that we are limited financially and

physically in some manners. So if there's a good effort happening in one area, then all of our resources should be put in that and if we want to contribute money in other projects or efforts, they should be 'complementary' efforts not 'competing' efforts. We should not compete like that!

TIME TO UNIT, NOT TO DIVIDE:

Is it easy or difficult to build a high school? It is Hard! But there are cities in this country, where we have two Islamic high schools within half a mile of each other. Why? Because this principal doesn't like the personality of that principal or he doesn't follow the same school of thought as the residents. This is ridiculous! Everybody has to suffer because somebody has a personality disorder or they don't know how to work with each other. We need to understand that the work of Islam is greater than ourselves! We have to put personality and individual preferences aside. You have to put them aside!

Chapter Summary

The chapter signifies the importance of supporting each other at individual as well as organizational level. Muslims live as minority in most of the western world. They cannot afford to be divided on the basis of sects, personality clashes and non-productive competition. We should accordingly combine our efforts for the greater good and furthering our cause. With our synergies, we can achieve much more than what we can individually.

PART 5: THE BIG PICTURE



يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ ضَرْبٌ مِّثْلُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ^٤ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَنْ يَخْلُقُوا ذُبَابًا وَلَوْ
اجْتَمَعُوا لَهُ^٥ وَإِنْ يَسْلُبْهُمْ الذُّبَابُ شَيْئًا لَا يَسْتَنْقِذُوهُ مِنْهُ^٦ ضَعُفَ الطَّالِبُ وَالْمَطْلُوبُ

مَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ^٧ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ

اللَّهُ يَصْطَلِي مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا^٨ وَمِنَ النَّاسِ^٩ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ

يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ^{١٠} وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ارْكَعُوا وَاسْجُدُوا وَاعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمْ وَافْعَلُوا الْخَيْرَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١١﴾

وَجَاهِدُوا فِي اللَّهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ^{١٢} هُوَ اجْتَبَاكُمْ وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ^{١٣} مِلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ
إِبْرَاهِيمَ^{١٤} هُوَ سَمَّاكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا لِيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ

عَلَى النَّاسِ ۖ فَاقْصِبُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِاللَّهِ هُوَ مَوْلَاكُمْ فَنِعْمَ الْمَوْلَى وَنِعْمَ النَّصِيرُ

O people, an example is presented, so listen to it. Indeed, those you invoke besides Allah will never create [as much as] a fly, even if they gathered together for that purpose. And if the fly should steal away from them a [tiny] thing, they could not recover it from him. Weak are the pursuer and pursued.

They have not appraised Allah with true appraisal. Indeed, Allah is Powerful and Exalted in Might.

Allah chooses from the angels, messengers and from the people. Indeed, Allah is Hearing and Seeing.

He knows what is [presently] before them and what will be after them. And to Allah will be returned [all] matters.

O you, who have believed, bow and prostrate and worship your Lord and do good so that you may succeed.

And strive for Allah with the striving due to Him. He has chosen you and has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty. [It is] the religion of your father, Abraham. Allah named you "Muslims" before [in former scriptures] and in this [revelation] that the Messenger may be a witness over you and you may be witnesses over the

people. So establish prayer and give zakah and hold fast to Allah. He is your protector; and excellent is the protector, and excellent is the helper.

(Quran 22.73-78)

In this section, which mainly takes inspiration from the last part of Surah Al-Hajj, we'll talk about the big picture about volunteering and working together in the path of Allah.

FIRST, LOOK AT THE MESSAGE

This passage begins with an address to humanity, 'Oh mankind an example has been given.'

The first verse is talking about Allah's power and human being's weakness. Allah SWT tells us that an example is about to be given; so listen carefully.

It is in the passive or "majhool" form. There is no mention of the faa'il or the doer, i.e. the one who gave the example. It says 'an example is given.' The purpose of using the passive is to conceal the subject or the doer. The reason for doing so is that Allah is talking to a hostile crowd who had a biased approach. Had they been told straight away that this message is from Allah, they would have stopped listening further as their thinking would choke because of their association with their 'gods' that they made up from wood and stone. This was how

the people of Makkah in the early days were addressed. In comparison, the audience in the Madni Quran was predominantly Muslim; so, in those verses Allah says, 'Daraba Allahu masalun' ('Allah strikes an example'). Allah mentions his name when addressing the believers so that the believers pay extra attention because of this, not less. But here, Allah highlights the speech or the content instead of the speaker.

The general population, tends to look, often unconsciously, at who's talking and then we listen to what they have to say. We look at all the peripherals first and it's very hard for us to look past that and hear the good thing being said by an unlikely source. This is the same reason, it is hard for the father of Ibraheem (A.S.) to accept what Ibraheem (A.S.) was saying even though what Ibraheem (A.S.) was talking about was absolute truth. Ibraheem (A.S.)'s father weighed his opinion and claims low, considering him 'just a kid' and thinking 'how can I listen to a kid?', what does he know?'

The attitude of the believers towards to the word of Allah, on contrary, should be what is mentioned in this famous statement attributed to Ali (R.A.): 'We judge the speech, before we judge the speaker.'

TODAY'S AND YESTERDAY'S GODS – AS POWERLESS AS THEIR PREDECESSORS

The core point here is that Allah gives us an example; so we should listen to it carefully.

'No doubt, those that you are calling upon other than Allah (meaning false Gods) won't be able to create a single fly even if they all got together for that purpose.'

So the example Allah gives is the powerlessness of idols and the powerlessness of false kings - kings who claim themselves to be gods! This clearly seems to have deep roots when we look at history. Thousands of years ago, there was a Firaun who said, 'Ana rabukum al-aala', 'I am your supreme lord.' He turned to his people and said, 'I don't see for you any God besides myself', calling himself "the supreme lord".

That sort of conception still appears in our day and age. We are living in crazy times. This 'idolization' of humans is not something restricted to the ancient times. It is happening in this day and age too. It is happening today in various shapes, forms and places. There are people who claim to be god now too! There are people who still wish to become 'idol' and there are other who 'worship' them! It's happening in our lifetime. May Allah swt protect us all.

So, Allah says whether they are idols or human false gods, with all what they possess, they cannot even create a single fly like the one that Allah swt created.'

Let's see the context for these ayahs to understand why the example of bee was mentioned. These verses were revealed in Makkah. The Mushrikoon used to worship idols. In pagan cultures people used to sacrifice animals or leave sweets, milk, honey and flowers etc. in front of these idols as a show of devotion. But what happens when you leave food out in the open? What shows up out of nowhere? Flies! A fly shows up and drinks the chocolate milk or eats from the snickers bar in front of the idol and the big old statue smiling back at it can't do anything. So the idea is that the foundation of their faith is that this idol is sacred and it has to be shown respect. But it gets disrespected in the highest temple by a lowly thing such as a fly! And they can't do anything about it.

So the foundations of their faith are crumbled in front of their own eyes. Even if all of their so-called gods could get together, what could they do? How could they even catch a fly? And even on top of that, if a fly comes and takes something from the food of someone, like the Firaun of ancient Egypt or the Firauns of our time, what are they going to do? They can't even get that little thing back. For this task, even if you line up all the best of the armies in the world, they can't accomplish this apparently small task! It's gone!

So, if the fly was to take something away from them, they wouldn't be able to get it back. Allah teaches us that He can

teach the lessons of His oneness and might even through a fly. If you just pay attention to the world around you, even a fly can give you guidance on tawheed. That's one of the miracles of the Quran; it changes human perspectives. Once you understand this passage, you don't look at this passage and read through as you used to before. It will change the way you see a fly buzzing around.

OUR INHERENT WEAKNESS:

“Dafuu al Talib Wal Matloub”. ‘The one who is seeking and the one being sought are both weak’. The one who is seeking, a lover, a fan, a student; and the one who is sought, a celebrity, a singer, an actor, a sports star – they are all inherently weak. We are running after these people and things but they are weak, just like us.

In the passage under discussion, Allah swt first highlights our weakness. We can't even get our things back from an apparently insignificant creature such as a fly. After this, Allah mentions, ‘They didn't appreciate Allah as He deserves to be appreciated.’ We seek everything else except Allah who is actually the only One that we should be seeking! Why don't we seek Allah? All that we are seeking other than him are weak. Why don't we appreciate Allah as He deserves to be appreciated? Why are we running around everywhere else? Why is everything a pursuit for us but Allah is not our matloub?

!!"مَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ"

So far, it has been established that we are weak and the worldly things and people that we seek are weak too. We are running after them and not realizing that it is Allah swt in whose pursuit our success is. Allah swt then tells us that he is Al-Qawi and Al-Azeez. 'He's mighty; He's strong; and He's the Ultimate Authority! In many English translations the word "Azeez" is translated as "mighty" but the word Azeez combines two things – "power and respect". Someone who has "izza" (the word from the same root word as Azeez) has two elements - authority and respect. There are authorities in the world that don't have respect and there are respectable figures that don't have authority. But when you have both of these together, you have "izza". Then you are Azeez. That is the meaning of Azeez which is one of the names of Allah swt.

You might be wondering what's the link between this passage and our discussion regarding the volunteer work? This will become clear shortly.

ISTIFAA AND ISTIJAB

Now as part of Allah's might, He swt tells us that 'He is the one who, purely of his own choice, selects messengers from the armies of the angels and among the legions of humanity.'

The word "Istafa" is at the heart of this discussion. 'اللَّهُ يَصْنَعُ فِي مَنْ'

الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا وَمِنَ النَّاسِ", 'Allah Selects the messengers from the angels and from humans.'

Al-Istafa comes from word "safee" which refers to purity. Like, in Urdu, you have the word "saaf" meaning clean or pure. But when you make a choice that is purely your own and no one else influenced your choice, no one had any say in your choice, nobody gave you a suggestion, it was entirely and completely your own choice, than that kind of choice is called 'al-istifaa'.

Let us understand this word from another analogy. Suppose I go to a grocery store and pick up a Kit-Kat. That's istifa. It's my own uninfluenced decision. If my wife asks me, 'Why you didn't buy a Bounty?' I say, 'Well, that's my "istifaa"; I like Kit-Kat, that's it. I like it. That's the only reason.' That's istifa.

Now look at the next verse, Allah talks about us, Muslims. He swt says, 'هُوَ اجْتَبَاكُمْ'. The English translations say, 'Allah selects you.' Note that the English word used for the translation of the word 'Ijtiba' is the same as the English word for translating the word 'Istifa'. However, from the Arabic linguistic point of view, these two words contain different meanings. The word istifa (which was used for the messengers) means that it's purely Allah's choice; whereas, the word ijtiba means 'to select someone based on qualifications or attributes'. For example, if you have a loose bolt on your kid's bike, you open the tool

box and select a spanner that is exactly the right size for the job. That's *ijtaba*. When I select this spanner, I didn't make *istifaa* but *ijtiba*. I chose the right tool for the right job. That's what the word *ijtiba* means. Similarly, for example, when I'm going to hire somebody, I will interview ten people in order to select one person. I'm not going to make *istifa*; it doesn't make any sense. I'm going to make *ijtiba*. I'm going to pick the right person for the right job. So Allah used a different word when he talked about you and me being Muslim. He used a word which suggests that he picked me and he picked you to be able to say *La-illaha illa Allah, Muhammadun ﷺ Rasullallah*. Why? Because he sees us fit for the job. He's got something in mind for us - for you and for me - and he sees that we are perfectly fit for that task; so he picked us. Think for a second. Shouldn't it be a big priority for us, then, to figure out what Allah wants us to do? What He wants me to?

UTILIZE ALL WHAT YOU HAVE FOR THE JOB YOU ARE ASSIGNED TO DO

Allah swt commands us in Surah Hadeed:

آمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَأَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا جَعَلَكُمْ مُسْتَحْلِفِينَ فِيهِ ۖ فَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَأَنْفَقُوا لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ

Believe in Allah and His Messenger, and donate from what He has entrusted you with. So those of you who believe and donate will have a mighty reward. (Quran 57:7)

The words 'what He has entrusted you with' cover every resource at your disposal. It covers whatever talents you have been given, whatever abilities you have been given, whatever financial resources you have been given, whatever social position you have been handed and so on. Use whatever you've got at your disposal and spend it for Allah, your Master. That's the demand of Allah in Surah Hadeed.

In the verse under discussion in this chapter, Allah swt is letting you know that you have been chosen for a particular task. You are not just a random selection to be a Muslim; you are an 'ijtiba'. Each and every one of us has a role to play and we have to figure out what it's going to be. That requires a deep assessment of oneself. That's why Allah swt chose you.

We skipped some part of the ayah to explain the difference between istifa and ijtiba. Let's go back now and balance the equation again.

Allah (swt) says, 'He knows whatever is in front of them and whatever's behind them and to Allah all decisions are returned.' The word for decisions is 'amoor'. This comes from 'amr' which means actions that were made with a specific and deliberate purpose. All such decisions will be returned to Allah and after issuing this warning to humanity, the believers are addressed. I want you to understand this transition. It's a very heavy and powerful transition. Let's look at the flow

again.

In the first part of this passage Allah swt is displeased with humanity. They are calling upon false gods. They don't even understand the simplicity of tawheed. Even though something as simple as a fly can teach them that lesson. They don't appreciate Allah as he deserves to be appreciated. On top of that even though a fly should have been enough to teach them about Allah, He sent messengers anyway. But they still didn't understand. Don't they realise that everything that they do in the past, the present and the future is on record? So they are in some serious trouble. Humanity is in serious trouble.

Now Allah says, If you care about each other you would be worried about the ultimate destiny of your fellow human beings. By default humans care about each other; that's just part of who we are by our natural disposition or fitrah. By the way, the word insaan is from uns, as pointed out by various scholars, which means that it is a creature full of compassion. We can't but help feel compassion for others. However, this trait and feeling of concern for others have been eroded or even taken out of our system gradually and slowly in our time. We have become desensitized. Otherwise we are originally programmed to feel compassion for others like us. We are supposed to be bothered when we see somebody in pain. We are supposed to be concerned when someone else is

suffering. But in modern educated, advanced, liberal and so-called humane civilised society, whether in the east or west, many people walk right by when they see someone lying on the pavement in pain. That's how we've been desensitized, or de-humanized. It's almost like if it's happening behind a screen for us. The major reason is because we see so many people dying, being injured or hurt on TV, in games and in movies that we think everything is a movie. Our life also becomes like a movie. So when we see something which bothers us, we just change the channel. That's how we have become - completely de-sensitized from our position of being genuine, caring, compassionate human beings.

But if you have still got some sensitivity left in you as a human, you will realise that you have a lot to do. And one of the most important aspects of caring for others is to remind them of their ultimate destination.

Who is responsible for this task of telling humanity that they are going to stand before Allah one day and answer for their deeds? Who is going to let them know? The messengers are not going to come anymore. The final Messenger ﷺ has left after doing his job. The companions have played their part. It's on our shoulders now! It's up to me and you now! So let us begin with ourselves.

START THE EFFORT BY FIXING YOURSELF

Allah swt tells us,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ارْكَعُوا وَاسْجُدُوا وَاعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمْ

‘O you who believe, make ruku, make sajdah, make yourselves slaves to your Master.’

The ruku and sujood are part of what act? Salat or prayers which is a physical manner of submission to Allah swt. So, the physical acts are being highlighted here.

If you see it from a non-Muslim point of view, when they see somebody making ruku, they think this guy is tired. ‘Why is he on his knees like that? He’s probably exhausted.’ When sprinters run and they’re exhausted, what do they do? They go in to ‘ruku’ on their knees to catch their breath. So when we humble ourselves in Ruku and sujood, the Muslims say, ‘Ya Allah, before you I have no strength.’ We give ourselves up in salat. Our obedience physically, from one act of obedience to another, is supposed to be reflected in our life. The more we grow as Muslims, the more humble and closer to Allah swt we are supposed to become. That’s what is supposed to happen over time in our worship and that’s when we finally, through salat, reach the state of ibadaah.

Ibadah is not an act. It’s a state of being. It’s a maqaam. It is to be a slave. We’ll reach the point where we understand,

internalise and accept deep down inside us that we are slaves, and that we have a master; we become content in that state. Salat will get us there.

It is unfortunate that we have many groups and organizations whose members have been working for many years but when you look at their prayers and other acts of worship, they are of a very poor standard and I have come across some members of the big organizations who hardly prayed Fajr on time and some who didn't even pray the five prayers!

By Allah you and I will not be able to do any good to anybody until we realise that we are nothing but slaves. This has to reflect in our way of life. There is no job on this planet which is lower than slavery. At the same time, there is no position or rank higher than the master. So when we say, 'I've accepted myself as abd', then I've accepted that there's no one higher than Allah and there's no one lower than myself as His 'abd'. That's what I have accepted. And when I've come to terms with that internally or psychologically and its not just something that I say but something I've accepted deep in the soul of my being, then I'm ready to do good. Now I'm ready to help others.

ATTITUDE OF AN ABD

So what is the concern? You really want to do work? You want

to be a volunteer? You want to help in a cause, or a dawah programme or an educational programme, an Islamic school, a media group or whatever? What is the first step? First get your ibadah in order. And ibadah doesn't just mean the acts of worship. That's the starting point that leads you to the state of it. Once you reach that state of ibadah, the doors of goodness will open for you. This is because when you are a slave, your pride and ego is gone. All you care is about is making the master happy. That's all that's on your mind. You've got nothing else in front of you. And when people say something that bothers you, you just leave it to Allah. Aoofawedoo amree ilallah in Allah ha basirun bilibaad.

Now you're ok. You are just concerned about what you've got to do. Things don't get under your skin or bother you anymore. Now you don't complain and say things like, 'I cant believe they said this or I'm never doing this again,' or, 'I did so much but no one appreciated me or that guy said this about me.' Remember you are a slave. People can say whatever they want. You only have to answer to your master. That's it. You should have no complaints with people.

DOING GOOD TO OTHERS

وَفَعَلُوا الْخَيْرَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

'And do good so that you can succeed.'

After, fixing ourselves, we then have a responsibility to do good to others. Why? Lallakum tuflihoon! 'So that you can attain true success!'

This ayah also related to our earlier discussion. I said that Islam is concerned with something more than the individual reform. This mission is concerned with more than just working on yourself. Otherwise, Allah swt would not have mentioned anything other than the rukoo, sujood and the obadah. That's working on yourself. When He says, 'Do good.' What does it mean? Do good to who? To others of-course! If you really want to be successful then you have to be helpful to others. Remember, when you do good to others its not only for them but its also for yourself.

AN IMPORTANT WARNING FOR ALL VOLUNTEERS

So, our voluntary contributions in whatever way shape or form are actually efforts to help ourselves. Don't ever think about the time you gave to a masjid or for a programme or a convention or a cheque you wrote for the school or the youth club or whatever and say, 'I helped such and such.' In reality, you only helped yourself! The moment I say, 'I helped them', it doesn't count for me anymore. If we claim it this way, we might not have it in our account in the aakhirah. You can't have it both ways. Allah only counts one intention. So, if you are going to give, whether it is time, money, effort,

suggestions, and so on, expect returns only from Allah. If you expect anything from anyone else, then know that Allah doesn't like shared intentions. He wants his attention to be exclusive. You try to put anybody else, yourself, or some other agenda in that attention, its gone. It doesn't count for anything.

As the Islamic organisations such as schools, dawah organisations, publishers and so on are donation-dependant, we sometimes see that somebody writes a cheque for \$20,000, and all of a sudden shaytan comes to them and says, 'Mabrook!' Then he says, 'By the way, why don't you give them a suggestion about the colour of the carpet? I mean, after all, you wrote a big cheque! You should have some weight in your opinion; so go and give a suggestion.' You didn't give a suggestion before you wrote the cheque; but all of a sudden your opinion has got \$20,000 heavier. So you want to give an opinion and you are expecting your opinion to be taken more seriously now because you gave some money. So your intention for giving the money was not to please Allah any more. It was for getting your opinion to weigh a little more, and that's all you will get out of that sadaqa. Is it worth it? Think about that. Don't ruin your sadaqa which you give in any cause by tying your contributions to expectations.

لَا تُبْطِلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالْأَذَى كَالَّذِي كَالَّذِي يُنْفِقُ مَالَهُ رِئَاءَ النَّاسِ

Do not waste your charity with reminders (of your generosity) or hurtful words, like those who donate their wealth just to show off. (Quran 2:264)

If you want to have expectations, have them with Allah. Personally, when I write a cheque for sadaqa, I write a little reminder on the top of the cheque, *ma naqasin mallin min sadakatin*, 'wealth doesn't decrease because of sadaka'. I remind myself, 'Who am I giving sadaqa to?' I'm actually depositing it in my *akhira* account; I remind myself that withdrawal is going to happen after I go into the dirt. You try to withdraw now, you won't get anything later.

STRIVE IN THE CAUSE OF ALLAH SWT THE WAY YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO STRIVE

Allah swt then says *وَجَاهِدُوا فِي اللَّهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ*. This deals with our attitude.

Islam is not the only religion which has spirituality. The Christians and the Buddhists and other religions have powerful spiritual traditions too. However, we do claim to have spirituality that is for a bigger purpose.

Let's take the example of planting a plant in the soil. You make sure it gets plenty of sun and you put plenty of water on it. That is fixing the soil. But what is the point of all these exercises and efforts if you don't plant a seed in the soil! So,

after fixing the soil, you have to put a seed in. The purpose of putting in a seed is so that it grows into a plant and eventually into a tree. When it grows into a tree, it'll give fruits that'll benefit yourself and others.

We working on ourselves is like fixing the soil, removing the weeds, making sure it gets plenty of sunlight. It is like doing zikr for our nafs but if we don't put the seed of working for the deen of Islam in these soil, what's the point of all that spirituality? Our spirituality is driven by purpose! Your purpose is supposed to drive that closeness to Allah with some solid contributions. These contributions can be various shapes or forms. For a mother who is so busy taking care of her children, her contribution may just be her kids. For a writer, it may be his authorship. For a poet, it maybe his creative writing which inspires the Muslims. It can manifest in many different ways but it must come out! You have to work for the deen of Allah.

SERIOUSNESS OF ISLAMIC VOLUNTEER WORK

How seriously should you take an Islamic volunteer effort? It is not befitting that voluntary efforts are not accorded the same level of seriousness and commitment as other areas of life.

You have a meeting at 7pm. You'd be lucky if somebody shows up by 7.30pm. And that's one off meetings. If it's every

week, then inna lilahe wa inna elahi rajioon! The general attitude is, 'its voluntary, who cares?' It's not as if you are getting paid for it. But if you understand this ayat then you'll realise that voluntary work done for the sake of Allah has more weight than anything! Nothing else you do pays as high as this work and is as beneficial to yourself as this! The parable of those who spend their wealth in God's way is that of a grain that produces seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. God multiplies for whom He wills. God is Bounteous and Knowing. (Quran 2:261)

HOW TO DEAL WITH 'BORING TASKS'

Before I close this session, let me tell you something very serious. Islamic work can get pretty boring at times. It may seem unfulfilling at times. Who wants to sit there and make a hundred copies of a flyer? That's not going to increase your imaan or is it? You press the green button on the copier and watch the flashing light go to and fro. Who enjoys doing that? Who enjoys sitting in a two hour meeting discussing the architects plans for the parking area of the masjid? It's called a masjid "board" meeting for a reason; it makes you bored! It does appear to be a very fulfilling work.

If you ever develop that feeling, remind yourself of your intentions. Before you walk into that meeting or that menial task, you should remind yourself, 'I'm not doing this for the

Youth Club or the MSA or anybody else; I am doing this for Allah and the only one I want appreciation from is Him!' If you do that, then you will have a great time. You'll enjoy every minute of it. So you have to walk in with the right intention. No task is too small in the eyes of Allah swt.

KEEP RENEWING YOUR INTENTIONS

It is also to be remembered that the intentions are not one-off things which are decided at the beginning and then they don't change. They get rusty pretty fast. Maybe you came in with good intentions but twenty minutes into the meeting, your good intention disappears and turns into a monster. So you have to constantly refresh the intentions like you clean the windscreen of your car on a rainy day. You have to fix it again and again because you can forget why you were there. You have to constantly remind yourself, 'I'm here for Allah. I'm here for a higher purpose. I'm not here just for myself.'

So, He (swt) says, 'Struggle for the sake of Allah,'; that struggle should be with no goal before you except Allah. As though the only one before you is Allah. And put in the best effort in it as He deserves.

YOU ARE CHOSEN FOR THAT STRUGGLE

The passage continues and Allah swt says, هُوَ اجْتَبَاكُمْ "He chose

you". These are the words I explained before. He especially crafted you, shaped you, and selected you for a task.

And don't you for a minute start thinking this work is too good for you; or that you are not good enough to do this work. Because Allah swt tells us that he didn't put any difficulty for you in your religion. وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ. He didn't put this religion on you so that you could be uncomfortable (like monasticism in Christianity, for instance).

LEGACY OF IBRAHIM A.S.

You and I have to remember that we are the legacy of Ibraheem (A.S.) - مِلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ. Before Allah motivates you and me to struggle, He makes us realise that we are from the family and nation of Ibraheem (A.S.). His struggle for Allah's cause is a role model for us. His family and their struggle is a role model for us. It is also to be noted that if anybody had a right to question Allah's orders, it would have been Ibraheem (A.S.) more than anybody else in the world. He could have asked, 'Jumping into the fire? what's the point of this exercise?' Is this really necessary? Fire? Really?' or 'Put a knife to my son's throat? My son? Really? He had to leave his family in the middle of the desert. When we go to hajj we see all these people doing saee between Safa and Marwa. The original saee is a sunnah of a woman, the wife of Ibraheem (A.S.) and

she'd given birth recently; so she's not physically in her peak form and she's running around to find water for her son. There were no air conditioners, no tiled floors, and no water coolers on the sides with cold zam-zam water in them at that time! Imagine the situation. That's the struggle that our father Ibraheem (A.S.) and his family did.

THE TRUE CHILDREN OF IBRAHIM A.S. WOULD NOT BE THE COMPLAINERS

Allah says that you are from that family! You should have an appreciation for struggle for Islam; if Ibraheem (A.S.) and Hagarah and Ismaeel (may Allah's peace be upon them all) didn't complain, what are you and I complaining about?

What are our complains? Meetings are too long? The tasks given to us are boring? Put these complains in context of our role models. What did Ibrahim A.S. and his family went through for Islam. What did the Prophet ﷺ and his companions had to bear for this religion? What were the sacrifices of our earlier generations for this deen? How do our complains compare with their struggle!

ALL WHAT YOU DO, ALLAH KNOWS ABOUT IT

Whatever good you do Allah will know it. Don't worry about that at all. People might not notice but Allah will. Allah will know. That's the power of intention.

There was a woman who used to sweep the Masjid An-Nabawi. People didn't even know her name and when the Prophet ﷺ came to know that she had passed away, he cried. You know how high her rank is? She wasn't a celebrity, she wasn't a speaker, she wasn't an alima, she didn't have that glory in the materialistic sense. Nobody knew her name even; but she was grand before Allah. Our attitude towards Islamic work should be that the one who needs to appreciate it definitely appreciates, no matter if no one else does.

THE MESSENGER WILL BE A WITNESS AGAINST US

In the last part of the passage, Allah swt says

لَيَكُونَنَّ الرَّسُولُ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ

He says, le yakoono rasulun alaikum shaheeda. 'So that the Messenger ﷺ will be a witness over you.' He will be a witness against us on the day of Judgement. If we don't take the work of our deen seriously, the one who is a mercy to mankind will bear witness against us!

We are sandwiched between humanity and the Messenger ﷺ. On the one hand the Messenger ﷺ will complain that they didn't do what I instructed them or asked them to do. On the other hand humanity might complain against us that we never got the message of truth from these people. We didn't

know Islam was a beautiful way of life.

However, if we do pay heed and devote ourselves to this duty, we may be able to make a claim in the hereafter that we tried our best to do the job assigned to us. If we ignore this call, the messenger ﷺ would himself be a witness against us on the day of judgement. We should accordingly take this job of ours very very seriously.

THREE KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF MUSLIM COMMUNITY

And by work of deen, I mean the thousands of projects out there as I explained earlier - not just one thing. Find yourself a noble cause and commit yourself to it. All of us don't have to struggle for the same thing. Ascertain what you are good at and what you believe in and what you feel is needed for the ummah which is not being fulfilled. Once you find it, do it and dedicate yourself to it.

In my mind, there are three kinds of services Muslims need to work on in present times, in order of priority:

1. Education (includes dawah, self-development, community projects and so on)
2. Social /Community Work
3. Protection of Muslim Community.

Working on education encompasses educating ourselves and

others about our deen in any way shape or form. It starts with ourselves , our families and then others. That's one grand area under which a lot of sub-projects can exist. Dawah, schooling and other aspects fall under this broad umbrella too.

Social/Community Work is helping people Muslim or non-Muslims in the locality or neighbourhood; for example cleaning up the area, providing meals for the hungry, helping out at the old people's homes and so on. It's helping the humanity.

Protection involves doing something that protects the community, our children, our institutions, marriages, families, our civil liberties, our religious freedom etc. This is another very important task.

These are three of the important areas where we can contribute. These are all worthy causes. Some people might engage in one and the others can contribute towards others; just like in the battlefield during the time of the Prophet ﷺ, you had people who were engaged with the enemy, others who took care of the sick, others who were providing food and water, others who were carrying off the injured and sick to points of safety and there were people who were guarding the Prophet ﷺ. All these were important tasks. So, we have these areas that we have to concern ourselves with and give ourselves to. We have to be volunteers.

TRAIN YOUR CHILDREN TO VOLUNTEER

We also have to train our kids to be volunteers. When your kids turn eleven or twelve, they should be volunteering. You should bring them to the masjid to serve the fasters or the saimeen during Ramadan. Our kids should learn to volunteer at an early age. They should learn to help others. We should be taking them to visit the old and the sick. We should take them to the grocery store to shop, not just for themselves but to buy something, sweets or toys or so on, to give to the needy members of the community. We have to instil these values in ourselves and in our children.

KEEP THE PRIORITIES RIGHT

Nowadays, a lot of Muslims try to skip these three areas of Islamic work and go into something deemed more exciting; public relations (PR) for Islam trying to 'improve the image of Islam in the eyes of the people', especially the westerners. They use slogans like, 'we are not extreme, Islam is really moderate and humane. Like us, please.'

If we actually acted and behaved like Muslims we wouldn't have to do PR. Our neighbours would testify for us; we wouldn't have to.

Our job is to stand up for our deen and Allah will take care of our protection. Allah will take care of our PR. So, keep your

priorities straight.

HOLD ONTO ALLAH

At the end of the passage Allah says,

فَأَقِمْوَا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِاللَّهِ

‘Establish prayer, give zakat and hold onto Allah.’

What does holding onto Allah mean? It means tie your hopes with Allah. Tie your expectations with Allah. Be in direct regular conversation with Allah. Don't ever let go of that. He is the one protecting you.

هُوَ مَوْلَاكُمْ فَنِعْمَ الْمَوْلَى

What a great ‘Maula’ or protector you have. What an awesome protector you have. Someone who is going to give you mawlaat and Naseer - Protection and help.

FIRST YOU DO YOUR JOB, THEN THE HELP OF ALLAH WILL ARRIVE

Nusrah, the word from which Allah's name ‘An-Naseer’ is derived, means ‘a great help’.

نِعْمَ النَّصِيرُ

What a great helped is he.

Allah swt says, when you start doing the work of my deen, I will help you like nobody else can help you. I will energise you like nobody else can energise you. That's his promise. This is a formulae from Allah. You put in your struggle for Allah, then help from Allah comes. We have numerous examples of this from the Quran and Sunnah. Muslims stood in the battlefield of Badr first, then an army of angels came down from heaven. The angels were not there fighting on their behalf when they themselves were not there. It's not like that. You have to go into the fight then they will show up. Then the help will come. Ibraheem (A.S.) jumped into the fire, then Allah made it cooled down with salamah. It wasn't cool ahead of time. It cooled down once he made the jump and when he did his bit. You want Allah's help? Do your job first. Get out there in the arena. This is the formulae Allah has taught us in the Quran. It is true at the individual as well as the community or group level. You take one step, Allah will take ten steps towards you. So, we have to make the struggle to be worthy of the help from Allah to come. This is the conclusion of this session.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explains that we have been specifically chosen by Allah swt to be alive today and witness the situations that we are witnessing. So, we should make the most out of this opportunity and strive in the way of Allah the way we are supposed to strive. This is our core job. We have been sent for this very purpose. Accordingly, the work of Islam has to be done with complete seriousness. Just because it is volunteer work, it cannot be trivialized. If we take the tasks at our workplace with ultimate seriousness, why can't we have the same attitude regarding Islamic work when we already know that this work is more important than any other work. This work deserves our prime time, our prime skills and our prime energies. If we don't take up this task, than the humanity may stand against us on the day of judgement. They would complain about us that we did not take the message of Islam to them. Even the Prophet ﷺ himself would be a witness against us that we foresake the mission that he gave in our hands. The time is now. While we are alive, we can still set our priorities straight.

PART 6: VOLUNTEER DISCIPLINE



إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَإِذَا كَانُوا مَعَهُ عَلَى أَمْرٍ جَامِعٍ لَمْ يَذْهَبُوا
حَتَّىٰ يَسْتَأْذِنُوهُ ۚ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَأْذِنُونَكَ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ۚ فَإِذَا
اسْتَأْذَنُوكَ لِبَعْضِ شَأْنِهِمْ فَأَذَنْ لِمَنْ شِئْتَ مِنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمُ اللَّهُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ
رَّحِيمٌ

The (true) believers are only those who believe in Allah and His Messenger, and when they are with him on a public matter, they do not leave without his permission.

Indeed, those who ask your permission (O Prophet ﷺ) are the ones who (truly) believe in Allah and His Messenger.

So when they ask your permission for a private matter, grant permission to whoever you wish and ask Allah's forgiveness for them. Surely Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Quran 24:62)



عَفَا اللَّهُ عَنْكَ لِمَ أَذْنَتْ لَهُمْ حَتَّى يَتَّبِعَ لَكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَتَعْلَمَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

لَا يَسْتَأْذِنُكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ أَنْ يُجَاهِدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ ۖ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالْمُتَّقِينَ

إِنَّمَا يَسْتَأْذِنُكَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَارْتَابَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ فَهُمْ فِي رَبِّهِمْ يَزِيدُونَ

وَلَوْ أَرَادُوا الْخُرُوجَ لَأَعَدُّوا لَهُ عُدَّةً وَلَكِنْ كَرِهَ اللَّهُ انْبِعَاثَهُمْ فَثَبَّطَهُمْ وَقِيلَ اقْعُدُوا مَعَ الْقَاعِدِينَ

May Allah pardon you 'O Prophet'! Why did you give them permission 'to stay behind' before those who told the truth were distinguished from those who were lying?

Those who believe in Allah and the Last Day do not ask for exemption from striving with their wealth and their lives. And Allah has perfect

knowledge of those who are mindful (of Him).

No one would ask for exemption except those who have no faith in Allah or the Last Day, and whose hearts are in doubt, so they are torn by their doubts.

Had they (really) intended to march forth, they would have made preparations for it. But Allah disliked that they should go, so He let them lag behind, and it was said (to them), "Stay with those (weak ones) who remain behind."

(Quran 9: 43-46)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SESSION:

In order to introduce this session, I have shared with you two passages which at first sight seem to be mutually contradictory, but in reality they complement each other. These passages include verse no. 62 from Surah An-Nur and verses 43-46 from Surah Tauba. Explanation of these verses and when do they apply would help us uncover some of the really important aspects with regards to volunteer discipline. Both the passages under discussion deal with seeking permission or an excuse (rukhsah) from Islamic work.

AN APPARENTLY CONTRADICTIONARY SET OF VERSES:

So let's start with Surah An-Nur. The selected ayah explains the following:

1. It is only the true believers who ask you for permission; it is a sign of their Imaan
2. When they ask for permission, give them permission where you can

Whereas, the passage from Surah Tauba informs us:

1. Those who are asking for permission to stay behind are those who have no Imaan
2. They should not be given a permission

From a surface-level reading of translation, one might think that these verses appear to be contradictory and opposite commands. However, as you would read through the explanation below, you would understand what they really point us towards how beautiful is the guidance they provide.

HOW DO WE MAKE SENSE OF THEM AND HOW ARE THEY RELATED TO VOLUNTEER DISCIPLINE?

Both the passages, as mentioned earlier, are to do with seeking permission or an excuse from Islamic work. We are discussing them because they represent some of the most beautiful examples of Quranic wisdom on this issue of Muslim volunteers seeking permission or Rukhsah from their leaders.

This verse in Surah An-Nur is remarkable in many aspects. The first part of the verse says, 'The believers are only those kinds of people who have faith in Allah and his Rasul ﷺ. The verse talks about the companions of beloved Prophet ﷺ, and discusses the situation when they are with the Prophet ﷺ on some collective mission, task or project, or when they go with him on some mission, or when he ﷺ assigns them to some duty, or he ﷺ assigns them a responsibility such as scouting an area or speaking to some tribe or any other work. This could be any form of task and not just military affairs. 'They, the noble companions, would not abandon (or leave) that task until they asked permission of the Prophet ﷺ. As can be seen, this passage has a great benefit for us as Islamic volunteer workers because it deals with ANY kind of collective Islamic work which the Quran calls as 'Al-Amr ul Jami'.

DIFFUSION OF RESPONSIBILITY

Let's now push that into the contemporary times. Suppose we are in a meeting of our Islamic volunteer organization and it is decided that by the end of this week you three, X,Y and Z persons, will get a particular task done. Each one of those three people thinks the other two will do it. So X thinks Y will do it. Y thinks Z will do it, and Z thinks Y or X will do it, and hence I don't have to do it. All three turn up empty handed the next week! This in psychology is called **diffusion of responsibility**.

Nobody takes responsibility. Everybody thinks that somebody else will do it and when you come back next week, you all look at each other and X says to Y, 'You didn't do it while in the meeting you were nodding your head as if you had understood it and were going to take care of it'. "But you were nodding your head too", Y replies. Same is the surprise the Z is in. All said and done, at the end of the week nobody gets the task done. No one inform the ameer or the leader that they would not be able to do the task. They all assumed that others would take care of the responsibility.

ISLAMIC GUIDANCE ON THE MATTER OF RESPONSIBILITY

The guidance of Quran is that whenever Islamic workers are on a collective task, there is no diffusion of responsibility. They don't abandon that task unless they explicitly tell the team leader - 'I am sorry, I can't do it. I got a situation at home. My mother-in-law is here' or something that can be considered a valid excuse. So you have to clearly let the leader know if you are unable to do a thing and what is your genuine valid excuse for that. You should not assume that somebody else will take care of it. The responsibilities have to be clearly known. If not clear, ask and clarify.

This is a very powerful guidance. This diffusion of responsibility is the kind of thing that destroys voluntary work. As a result of it, the leadership complain that volunteers don't do anything

and the volunteers say that the leadership is not getting anything done. Nothing is being done because everybody thinks someone else will do it. And the whole effort or project is stagnant. But the Quranic advice keeps the machinery from breaking. What it means is that if you are not going to be able to do it, come out and say it. If you have another important commitment in parallel or have an emergency, say it and be open about what you can and can't do. Don't expect that the leader will automatically pick it without you explaining it to them.

'INSHA ALLAH', I WILL DO IT

Another related issue concerns the word Insha Allah. We have to change the culture of corrupting the meaning of these beautiful words. We have to stop that. That's a sacred phrase. It's a beautiful thing to say – 'Insha Allah'. We have turned it to something ugly! The way most people use it nowadays, Insha Allah can mean so many different things: It can mean 'yes', it can mean 'never', it can mean 'may be, if I'm in the mood'. It could also mean 'I want to say no but I don't want to be heard like that'! It could be any of those meanings. It could mean anything!

So be clear in what you can and cannot do. Be clear in your commitments and especially in committee tasks and team tasks. If you can't do a thing, say it clearly and do not leave

any ambiguity. Do not leave people hanging by saying insha Allah when you don't really intend to do a thing.

DO WE TAKE ISLAMIC VOLUNTEER WORK AS SERIOUSLY AS WE TAKE OUR JOBS?

In order to understand the issue better, we can use another example. Let's suppose that you have a team at your job and your team is given a task. Your manager says, 'You three have this task.' What would you three do? You would talk to each other and discuss how each of you would do certain parts of that task. You would also remind each other that you have to coordinate well with each other in order to get the task done; So that you won't have a situation at the end of the deadline in which one of the guys says, 'I thought you were going to do everything, that's why I was on vacation this week'. None of the employees will do that because they know what's going to happen if they do that - they will get fired. They will lose their job!

But in Islamic work, because it's voluntary, you may get a response like 'What are you going to do?, Fire me? I don't get a pay check anyway!'; OR, 'Go ahead with what you are going to do! I won't come here anymore anyways'; OR 'Fine, it was boring anyway.' It is a great mistake when the volunteers start to think that because the Islamic work is voluntary, they can make it trivial or they can go easy with it

and not take it seriously. It is a grave mistake when volunteers think that they don't have to meet the deadline in volunteer work unlike how they behave at work or university.

What happens when you feel that you are not going to meet a deadline at work? You stay late! You sweat it out! You exert extra efforts and ensure that you finish the work. Why? Because you want to keep the job. There's a seriousness in attitude when it comes to your job or work; but this, very unfortunately, is not the case when we think about Islamic work. We must remember that Islamic work is more important than any other task! It is an honor from Allah swt that He has chosen us to do this work. We should be grateful for this and try to do our best. We should realize that by doing such volunteer Islamic work, we are benefitting our own selves and we should not let go this opportunity.

MANIPULATIVE LEADERSHIP

Now on the flip side, let's imagine that you have an ameer or somebody who's in charge of a project or a team and he gives you a task. When you say you can't do it, he responds by saying, 'Struggle like it deserves to be struggled for, and stop making excuses!' You say, 'Brother, my son is sick; my wife is sick; I got to take care of them first.' He references another ayah from Quran and says, 'Your money and children are a fitnah (trial) for you; Allah has the ultimate

reward.' Let her be sick, Allah will take care of her. You think you will take care of her? Have some imaan! Do the work I ask you to do.'

Leadership (about which we'll talk in more detail in one of the following sections) should not be emotionally manipulative. You can't give your volunteers a religious guilt trip. The Prophet ﷺ never did it. He never made people feel that way when they came and asked to be excused.

So, if you are in a situation and the leadership makes you feel guilty when you come to say, 'Sorry I can't do this,' try not be affected by their emotional blackmailing. First of all, you coming and saying, 'Sorry, I can't do it', was a choice; you didn't have to come. You could have just skipped on the whole thing and when they asked, you could have said, 'Oh I forgot.' But the fact that you made an effort to come and say, 'Look I know this is important, but I can't do it; please assign to someone else', is a show of how much you believe in the project and is a show that you take it seriously. So that should not be turned into a guilt trip by the leadership. That's bad leadership. That's emotionally manipulative leadership and that's the kind of leadership everybody runs away from. Such leaders often complain, 'I don't have any volunteers; nobody works with me.' Obviously when you act like that, who would want to work with you?

Even if the leader himself never spends any time with his family and in taking care of his or her other responsibilities, this in itself is an incorrect behaviour. This can never be quoted as an exemplary behaviour. Maybe you need to go home a little too. Spend time with your family and give them their rights. This is a very important area on the issue of seeking and giving permission that we should all understand.

GUIDANCE FOR LEADERS: WHEN TO GIVE OUT THE PERMISSION

Taking permission when you are a volunteer is a sign of your commitment but in the verses under discussion, the leadership is also given a very beneficial advice. One of the qualities expected from the leadership is that, 'If they come to ask you permission for some of their important matters, then give it.' But it should not be a weak or a lame excuse for trivial things. For example, 'Hey, by the way, 'by the way, the new movie just came out and I can't wait to see it'; or 'we are going to buy our suits for the wedding party, that's why I can't make to the program, sorry.' All these are examples of flimsy excuses but if they come to you with an excuse that is legitimate or serious, than in that case the rule is, 'give permission to whomever among them you will [based on legitimate reasons].'

Remember it's a leader's discretion to give or not to give

permission. At the end of day, the leader is given the right by Allah swt that he or she has the choice regarding giving or not giving the permission.

WHY DOESN'T HE GIVE ME RUKHSAH? – A LOOK FROM LEADER'S PERSPECTIVE:

Let us now ponder on the verse from Surah Tauba and try to understand the apparent contradiction by an example. Suppose there's a store with a number of employees. Among those many employees, there is a guy who is really a star; he is really hard working. It is that guy who is really running the store single-handedly. On the other hand, there is another guy - the nephew or a relative of someone in the organization - who has got the job through connections and doesn't do much work. It's as if he's on vacation even when he's at work. So, now the good employee comes and asks the manager for a day off. At the same time, the lousy employee comes and asks for a day off too. To whom the manager is going to give a day off? What makes sense? He is going to give it to the lousy employee! You know why? Because, whether the lousy employee is there or not, it's the same thing for the manager. His presence is not going to make any difference. So the manager says, 'Chutti maro, go' [Translation of this Urdu expression: Go, enjoy your leave]. On the other hand, the guy who works hard, the manager is not going to give him even a

day off.

They both walk off and the lazy one says to himself, 'You know what? I don't do any work and still I get a day off.' And the other one's thinking, 'Man, I am working so hard and definitely deserve a day off; yet he does not give me even a day off! He is giving leave to that slacker. That's not fair.' But what he doesn't realize is that he didn't give him a day off not because he doesn't like him or he is being unfair; but because he is more valuable to the manager than anyone else – his presence really matters for him. It's a proof of how valuable he is.

So sometimes when someone used to come with a legitimate excuse to the Prophet ﷺ and say, 'I cannot do this task for this reason', the Prophet ﷺ would say, 'I can't give you permission, I need you!'

That's a discretion on the Prophet ﷺ but if he can afford to let him go, he will. So the leader has to be merciful. However, he also needs to understand the needs of the work. So press upon your followers but don't press so much that they break. That's the balance we need to aim for.

WHEN SHOULD RUKHSAH OR A PERMISSION NOT BE GRANTED?

Surah Taubah, from beginning to end, is tackling an

emergency situation. It's a state of emergency for the whole Muslim community. Makkah has just been conquered and we have just poked at the Roman hornet's nest. And now there's a big conflict about to begin between us and the Romans. So, the Messenger ﷺ starts preparing for an open draft. This was the first time in Islamic history that it was mandatory on every one capable of fighting to come and join the army. Before that, it was voluntary. Participation in Badr and Uhud were voluntary. Ahzaab was voluntary. But Tabuk was an event with mandatory participation. So, if anyone didn't show up, he would better have a good excuse. We are heading towards Tabuk. We are going to meet the Roman army of around 100,000 men; it's not a light matter.

The hypocrites (munafiqoon) weren't up for it so they came to the Prophet ﷺ with all the lame excuses that one can think off. One of them came and said, 'Oh Messenger of Allah, give me permission. See, I have a weak spot for women. So when we are going to pass through some towns with really beautiful women, I won't be able to control myself. So I am going to put myself in fitnah and, therefore, please allow me not to go into the battle against the Romans.'

The Prophet ﷺ, despite he knew that the excuse presented to him was a lame one, still heard this and allowed the person to stay behind. And that's the genius of the Prophet ﷺ. That kind

of a joker who made a foolish excuse like this would have been a liability on the battle field, not an asset. Had they come out, they would have caused nothing more than a disruption. They would have been a problem not a solution. On the battlefield, you need the tightest discipline. Even if one soldier leaves his position, there can be a chaos. So, if you have an unreliable soldier, you tell him, 'Why don't you stay at home and cook? Let the real soldiers go.' So if he's coming and asking for an excuse, it's better you let him stay.

But despite this, Allah instructs the Prophet ﷺ that in a state of emergency, 'When people come and ask you to give permission, don't give them permission.' And you will find that even though you did not give them permission, they will still stay behind and they'll prove their disobedience to you; they'll prove their hypocrisy. So I did not want you to give them permission this time'. So Allah asks the Prophet ﷺ that in a state of emergency, 'Why did you give them permission?' Don't give permission until you can confirm who is speaking the truth and who is lying.

From this we learn that in a state of emergency or a life and death situations for the organization or the cause, the permissions are dropped. During those times, there's no approvals for 'Please excuse me, I have problem.' No, that permission will not be given. And actually the only people

excused were the ones Allah himself excused in Sura Taubah.

THE STANDARD PROTOCOL FOR VOLUNTEERS AND THEIR LEADERS:

In the light of above discussion, we have learnt from the selected passage from Surah An-Nur the standard protocol of volunteer discipline. If you have an issue, ask permission. Leadership should go out of their way to try to give the permission in most cases. That should be the rule. Let it go and that's a show of courtesy to the volunteers. Don't make them feel bad about it. Do not make them feel that they are less of a volunteer if they ask for permission or rukhsah. Respect them and honour their request. The fact that the volunteers come and ask you for permission is a sign that they truly respect you.

We know from the study of Seerah that under normal circumstances, the hypocrites never asked for permission. The only reason they came to ask for permission was because it was mandatory for everyone to participate this time. They never came to ask for permission voluntarily or at their own will. For the people who come to ask for permission voluntarily, it is sign of their belief and their imaan. That's what surah an-Nur points out. On the other hand, surah Tauba explains that when in a state of emergency, people come making lame excuses; that's a proof that they have no imaan. This is the state that shows that their hearts are riddled with doubt and they are

going to go back and forth in their doubts.

THE STATE OF THOSE WHO MAKE LAME EXCUSES TESTIFIES AGAINST THEIR CLAIMS

In the verse 46 of Surah Tauba, Allah swt has uncovered the state of hypocrites who were trying to deceive the Prophet ﷺ and the believers. Picture in your mind a guy coming to the Rasul ﷺ and saying, 'I was ready to go; but you know, at the last minute this thing happened. You know me! I was ready.' Allah says, 'Had they really intended to come with you, they would have packed their bags and done the preparation'. How many bags did they fill? None! They had not packed. Allah called them out because He knew what was inside their hearts and inside their houses. They came and said that they were ready. Allah responded by asking about how ready they were? Allah SWT disliked appointing these people with the Prophet ﷺ in battle. Allah did not want them to come because of their crookedness and hypocrisy. Allah swt clarified to his messenger ﷺ that such people shouldn't have the honour of accompanying you. That's why they stayed behind. He made them lag behind. This is the insult. In the Arabic language, Quaidoon is used for men, women and children that don't go to battle. As Allah says, 'sit back with 'Al-Quaidoon' - the women and children who sit back. That's what He calls them.

So this was a session on volunteer discipline, in general, and,

specifically, permission or Rukhsah. The next session is about giving your opinion.

PART 7: SHURA - GIVING AND TAKING OPINIONS



يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهَ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ أَذِلَّةٌ عَلَى
الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَعِزَّةٌ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ يُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَخَافُونَ لَوْمَةَ لَائِمٍ ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ
يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

O you who believe! Whoever from among you turns back from his religion (Islam), Allah will bring forth [in place of them] a people He will love and who will love Him, [who are] humble toward the believers, mightily proud towards the disbelievers, striving in the way of Allah; and they do not fear the blame of (any) blamer. That is the Grace of Allah (that) He brings to whomever He decides; and Allah is Ever-Embracing, Ever-Knowing. (Quran 5:54)

فَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَمَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۖ وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ

وَالَّذِينَ يَجْتَنِبُونَ كَبَائِرَ الْإِثْمِ وَالْفَوَاحِشَ وَإِذَا مَا غَضِبُوا هُمْ يَغْفِرُونَ

وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَىٰ بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ

AND [remember that] whatever you are given [now] is but for the [passing] enjoyment of life in this world - whereas that which is with God is far better and more enduring. [It shall be given] to all who attain to faith and in their Sustainer place their trust.

And those who avoid the major sins and immoralities, and when they are angry, they forgive.

And those who have responded to their lord and established prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves, and from what We have provided them, they spend. (Quran 42:36-38)

وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ ۖ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

And consult with them in (conducting) matters. Once you make a decision, put your trust in Allah. Surely Allah loves those who trust in Him. (Quran 3:159)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECTION

This section deals with voicing your concern or opinion in an organization in a manner that is coherent with our Islamic values and productive for the work that we are engaged in. What are the guidelines that we have to follow when we give our opinion? What are the ethics of giving our opinion? This section of our book will deal with these aspects.

The first of the verses I would like to share with you in relation to this are from Sura Maida, 'Those who have iman if anyone goes back on their religion Allah will replace them and Allah will bring another nation He will love them and they will love him. They will be extremely humble to the believers and severe against the disbelievers.' (Quran 42:54)

BEING HUMBLE IN GIVING SUGGESTIONS

Before we give our opinion, we must know what it means to be humble in our interaction with other believers. The Arabic word for humility comes from the word 'zulala'. Zulala is something that you walk over, for example, a rug. So are we being told that we have to let other believers walk over us? This is basically to guide us that we have to be extremely humble in our interactions with other believers. At the same time, we should be extremely tough with our enemy

(disbelievers in this verse means 'enemies'). Our belief should be so firm that nothing should be able to shake it. Our enemies should find us very very heavily rooted in our belief; none of their efforts to sway us away from our deen should be able to deviate us.

DON'T BE SHY IN VOICING YOUR OPINION:

Before we progress our discussion further, it is very important to understand the context of this surah. Victory of Islam has just come through. Makkah has been conquered. It is now directed that the Muslims have to be tough with the Kafirun as they were trying to destabilize Islam and the state of Madinah. That was their attitude.

Allah then adds further in relation to the topic of giving your opinion: 'They struggle for the sake of Allah and they don't fear the blame of anyone who casts blame.'

Please read carefully. It says, 'They don't fear the blame of anyone who blames them.' That is the criticism of anyone who criticizes them when they voice their opinion. They don't look around and say, 'What are people going to say if I say this?'; or 'It is in my conscious. I can't sit on it.. I feel like it is important to give this thought and I should say something but everybody around me is going to think I am weirdo or I am a trouble maker or I'm causing problems, so I should just stay quiet.' No!

You shouldn't just stay quiet.

DO NOT GIVE IN TO PEER-PRESSURE

This peer pressure thing is against the ethics in an Islamic organization. This is because organizations tend to develop momentum once they start going in a direction and they go full steam ahead. At that time you and your good conscious realize that there is something wrong with this direction, but you don't voice your opinion because everybody is too excited about continuing to go. Maybe it's not the best direction but the train's already left the station, so to say.

You should and you have to voice your concern no matter what other people say. You have to be courageous about voicing your sincere opinions. Having said that, you don't have to be a punk about it either.

After understanding the importance of giving opinions, let us now discuss the manners of doing it.

BEING RESPECTFUL AND KIND IN GIVING OPINION

You don't have to make trouble at a meeting by saying things like, 'What we are doing is hypocrisy' or 'we are a complete failure' and so on. There are respectful ways of voicing your opinion! You can be polite and decent and say things like, "I am not too comfortable with this...", 'I don't want to be

offensive but how can we justify this...' or 'This doesn't seem right to me...' The same person who is very decent in his office is sometime not that decent in the Islamic sittings. That shouldn't be the case. This work is more central to our purpose of life and deserves more respect.

There is no better key to unlock the heart than kindness in giving suggestion and advice. Gentleness in exhortation and softness in speech are the fundamental traits of true believers, as the Prophet ﷺ said, "Kindness is not to be found in anything but that it adds to its beauty, and it is not withdrawn from anything but it makes it defective." [Muslim]

The other thing is that voicing your opinion is not just about something that is wrong, but it can also be a suggestion for improvement. If you have a suggestion for betterment or a strategic suggestion, do voice it.

INTENTIONS MATTER!

You should never be afraid of giving these kinds of suggestions; but keep in mind that it is something that could either save you or destroy you. If our intention is not right and we are seeking personal, materialistic or ego-related benefits or satisfaction for ourselves, or if our objective is dunya, then it can destroy us.

We have to remember that giving a sincere suggestion for the

sake of Allah is an act of worship. Giving a suggestion is just like giving sadaqah or charity. Sadaqah should only be for pleasing Allah swt. We cannot have partners in for whom we are doing it. Likewise, giving sincere advice should only be for Allah. If you expect returns in dunya (this world) from this sadaqah, then why do you expect from Allah to count this for you in the akhirah. If you expect that your opinion should be taken and acted upon, then in that case you did not give that opinion for the sake of Allah. You gave it for the sake of getting it followed. You gave that opinion for yourself!

WHAT IF YOUR SUGGESTION IS NOT FOLLOWED

As stated above, giving your opinion is an act of worship. A good way of understanding the method of giving your opinion is through salat (prayers). In the salaah, for example, let's say that the imam confused the number of rakahs he offered in Zuhr prayer. Shaytan got to him and he got up for the 5th rakat. You're standing behind. What do you do? You give your opinion. How do you give your opinion? You say, 'Subhan Allah'. But let's suppose the imam still stands up and makes the full fifth rakat. What do you do then? You don't do what you think is right and cut off after the fourth rakah; you keep quiet and follow along. Why? Because the discipline of the group is more important than you being right individually. Your responsibility was completed the moment you voiced

your concern. If you courageously voiced your concern then the onus for things going wrong are not on your shoulders; it's on the leadership. You did your part.

We should make the following dua every time we give our opinion, 'Ya Allah, I gave given this opinion for your sake. Please accept it as an act of worship for you.'

WHAT IF YOUR OPINION IS ACCEPTED AND TAKEN

If we truly have our intentions right then instead of being offended, we should be terribly afraid if our opinion is taken. Because, if our opinion is taken, then the entire responsibility falls on us. It went from the leadership's opinion to my opinion. If something goes wrong, I will be asked about it because that was my suggestion. So know that it is very important to give your suggestions, however when you do that, carefully think it through and then give a sincere suggestion. Ask Allah for guidance when you make a suggestion and do not be offended when it is not taken. It's not the end of the world. It's not like kufr and imaan. Do not fall into that sort of a thinking when you rate your opinion so high that you tend to believe that your opinion was 'iman' and everything else was 'kufr'. Absolute authority belongs only to Allah. Not to the khateeb, not to the scholars, and not to yourself, not to organizations, not to anybody, but Allah. So don't be afraid to give your opinion, but don't be too hung up on it either.

A TRAIT OF HYPOCRITES:

Loving their own opinions and being hung up on getting them implemented, irrespective of expected outcomes, is something that hypocrites used to do.

'Do we have any authority?' 'Nobody listens to us; nobody takes what we say seriously'. That's what they said and got offended when their opinion was not taken at the time of Uhud. So, we should not be like them and should not have that kind of an attitude. That's the first important point regarding giving opinions and suggestions.

PURIFYING OURSELVES FIRST:

The second point that I wish to discuss is from a long passage from Surah Shura as presented at the beginning of this section. Let's discuss it part by part. The passage first explains some prerequisites to shura and then gradually moves on towards the actual process of consultation.

In the beginning of this passage, Allah swt says, 'Whatever you have been given is mataa (provisions) to enjoy in this life but whatever Allah has is better for those who truly believe. And they place their complete trust in Allah.' (Quran 42:36)

The passage begins with Tawakkul, reliance or dependence on Allah. Then moves on to another theme.

‘Those who stay away from major sins and all forms of vulgarity... .’ (Quran 42:37)

How does this relate to our discussion? If your opinion is going to be worth something then you have to be worth something before Allah. And we, as workers of Islam, have to get away from major sins³ first of all. We talked about this in the first section of this book which dealt with balancing the individual worship with our volunteering activities. Now we have to make sure that at least we shouldn't be engrossed in major sins.

BEWARE OF AL-FAWAHISH:

One of the major sins that we should be particularly careful about is Al-Fawahish (الْفَوَاحِش) or vulgarity. This means all forms of shamelessness, vulgarity or obscenity. Stop for a minute and ponder upon this. ‘Fawahisha’ or shamelessness is already a part of Kabair (major sins), but Allah has mentioned it in this Ayah separately as well. He said “kabaair wal fawaahish” (the big sins and vulgarity). Why is it so? It is to highlight importance of protecting our chastity, especially when we are doing an Islamic volunteer work.

So, especially the young guys and young girls, when you are volunteering at the MSA or ICNA convention or at your university or in an event, you have to watch out for vulgarity

³ A list of major sins has been compiled in Appendix A.

and protect your chastity. Shaytaan will try its best to destroy you through this. There should be no inappropriate interactions. We do hear comments like, 'we are just sitting in meeting' or 'we are taking Shura.' That's not Shura and we have to refrain from anything that plays against our modesty and 'haya'. So you have to guard yourself extra when you do Islamic work because it is the easiest way Shaytaan can get you. He will bombard you with such opportunities and ideas.

Some guys grow a beard and think that it's a safeguard against the fitnah on campus but shaytaan may put 'waswasa' to a girl and she'll come up to you and say, 'By the way, I am in your bio class.' That will be the test when you will have to prove your strength by clinging on to what Allah and His messenger ﷺ have brought and refrain from what they have asked us to refrain from. Same thing can happen to our sisters as well who may put a hijab and think that it will deter the opposite gender from crossing boundaries. It sometime may not happen and you will need to show courage to withstand that.

Shaytaan will try to mess with you. He will try to ruin you, and now you will be going to the convention, for who knows, what reason. You are attending the meetings extra early and you are all dressed up and over-perfumed, for God knows what reason. It happens! And this happens to boys as well as girls.

So beware of Shaytan's snare.

CONTROLLING ANGER:

And the next point in the verse is, 'they forgive even when they are angry.' (Quran 42:37)

What is the most difficult urge or feeling to control for young people? It's the tendency towards the opposite gender. If you can control that, then the next big problem is what? Your temper.

Somebody says something you don't like and that let's you tempers flare!

In the passage under discussion, Allah swt immediately mentions that if you can control 'fawahish' then you will not only be able to control your anger but you'll also be able to forgive others. And that's the key to successful Islamic work. You have to work with others who would sometimes raise your blood pressure. It does happen. It doesn't matter whether you're working at a masjid or a school or any other community organization. It doesn't matter what voluntary work you are doing. You will be around people that will get on your nerves and they will crawl under your skin and some will make your blood boil and they will make you want to say something bad. But when that urge comes to you just recite, **وَإِذَا مَا غَضِبُوا هُمْ يَغْفِرُونَ** 'Whenever they get mad, they forgive.' (42:37)

It does not just finish at getting calmed-down when angry. The words of Allah are, 'THEY FORGIVE.' They move on. They learn to grow a thick skin. If people who are going to work for Islam don't have a thick skin, they'd better grow one and be mentally prepared to be offended a lot. That comes with the territory. This also is true for other areas of life like in families and at the workplace.

ALLAH'S WORK IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOUR ANGER

Many people join organizations with good intention and at the start are given congratulations and hugs, but a few months down the lane, they hear something they did not want to hear and they get offended and say, 'I am never going back there again.' You ask, 'Why?' The reply is, 'You don't know what they said to me?'

What that guy said to you was your test of whether you get angry or not. This is because Allah's work is more important than your anger and your pride. If you were doing good work in that organization, you go back keep doing it! I am not saying you let people walk all over you, but you should stand up for yourself. Sometimes, people give sarcastic remarks and say things that burn others from inside. For example, there are husband who when their wives make a good meal say, "Hey, it's a really tasty food today, Were you ok today. Your food otherwise is pathetic". Why can't we simply appreciate others

and say, 'It's good, nice food.'

Such disrespectful comments, in the context of Islamic organizations, add up till the person goes crazy. They keep building up till the kettle overflows.

But you, on the receiving end, should learn to take it and grow a thick skin. Learn to laugh it off. Learn to hear obscene and offensive things and just laugh them off and let them go. That's the way you will be able to continue your work. And those people who test your patience, they are a blessing because Allah teaches you 'sabr' or patience through them. Otherwise you may not even be able to learn what sabr is. Sabr would just be a theory. What is sabr if it is not tested? And sometimes it's tested by those who are close to us and those who work with us.

CONSULTATION

Finally the verse says, 'Those who have responded to their Master [and they did not forget their individual responsibility when doing the collective work], they establish salaah and their decisions are essentially consultation among them.'
(42:38)

Allah swt did not say that their matters are based on consultation; the ayah says, 'their matters are consultation'. All their decisions are consultation.

WHAT SHURA IS NOT

Consultation is not an empty suggestion box which says "put your suggestions here" and there is a shredder at the bottom. Or, 'Brother, if you have a concern, say it in the mic.' The brother says, 'I think we should have a youth program!'. 'Jazakallah, Next!'. 'I think we should have a women's programme!'. 'Jazakallah, Next!'. Jazakallah, Jazakallah, Jazakallah. Move on! That's not shura brothers. Shura isn't just to let people blow their hot air and say 'Jazakallah' afterwards and do whatever you are going to do. That's not shura. So what shura actually is?

WHAT SHURA IS

Shura is to take sincere opinions seriously into consideration.

You should not have your mind made before you go to a shura meeting. If you go there with decisions already made or after making your mind up, then it's not called a shura meeting. If you have your mind made up already, then any opinion that comes to you, is just going to be knocked out of the park for a six. You would just be sitting there to state and defend your opinion. That's not shura.

Shura means that you are open to others' ideas and that you haven't yet made up your mind. In shura, thoughts are exchanged, participates are open to ideas and are willing to

listen to each other in the pursuit of making best possible decisions. It may happen that what you had in mind isn't the best solution, and what the others offer maybe better or a combination of the two can work well. So, be open, and as advised earlier, and do not be hung up on your own ideas. You have to go to shura with a shura attitude and that's when shura is shura. That's when it really counts for something.

IF YOU ARE NOT SATISFIED WITH SHURA DECISION:

Now if you do give a suggestion and it's serious (I am not talking about things like colour of the carpet, I'm talking about serious stuff like who should be eligible for sadaqa or who should be the next school principal or something big), and you think there is a serious problem with the decision of the committee then what should you do?

What you are required to do is that you should not discuss it with fellow volunteers. You should discuss it with someone above you. You discuss it with the Ameer and don't discuss it with anybody else. If you do, that's not shura. It's najwa (secret discussions) and we will discuss this in next session of this book. If the ameer does not take it seriously either, you take it to somebody above him. If nothing happens there as well, then you bring it up one final time in front of everybody and say, 'I have brought this suggestion up a number of occasions and this is the last time I'm bringing it up. I will not bring it up again.'

Here are my concerns...and they haven't been met.'

And if you think it's a life and death issue, then that's your last draw. You say it publicly, 'this is my concern and in good faith I cannot continue to work in this organization, (if this is the case) I will not bring it up again.'

But while doing so, do not forget to check your intentions and identify if ego is involved at any stage.

What was the channel? First you bring it up to the one above, then one above that, then in front of everyone and you are done. Don't email anybody about it. No going back and forth. No discussions after the meeting. It's finished. It is dead.

MANNERS OF LEAVING AN ORGANIZATION UPON DISAGREEMENT:

As you are leaving the organization, if that is unfortunately the case, make dua for the organization. 'May Allah bless this effort. May Allah unite us. May Allah forgive my and your shortcomings.' Leave on a good note. Don't leave like it was a wrestling match. Don't walk away angry. These are your brothers. You want to see them in Jannah. You are all here for the same reason - to please Allah and your leaving of that organization should also be for this purpose – to please Allah. If your reason for leaving is not this but something else, question yourself and question your decisions. Nobody is

getting a pay cheque. Everybody here is a volunteer. If there's anger in the meetings, it's because shaytan is there. He's your enemy, not you of each other. Remember Islamic workers are not enemies of each other! Shaytan is your common enemy. Realize that and don't be fooled by him.

WEIGH YOUR WORDS BEFORE YOU SAY THEM

The next part of the verse says, 'Tell my slaves, say the better thing.'

In your mind, before you open your mouth, there should be a multiple choice questionnaire. I'm about to say, 'you are wrong; what you have just said is all rubbish,' or I could say it this way, 'I don't think I agree with that.'" Maybe I should choose the second way. Think through what you are going to say. And if you don't do that, it is guaranteed that Shaytan will cause dissent among you. No doubt about it! So think and rethink not only what you are going to say but how you are going to say it. That's Shura - a healthy Shura.

BEING GENUINE

Be respectable, be courteous but don't respect people just to pander to them. Don't do ingenuine or false praises. Like, 'Jazakallah, you are doing so much for our community but I have a suggestion.' Don't do that if it's not genuine! Don't butter him up first and then tell him how bad he is. If it's not

from the heart, don't say it. It's better for you to stay quiet if there is no genuine need to speak.

So these are the basics of taking and giving of opinions in organizations. The next session is about najwa or secret meetings or discussions.

Chapter summary

This chapter outlines the manners of giving and taking opinions. We should never hold back our good suggestions because of peer-pressure. We have to share them; but it has to be done in a respectful manner, especially if we are criticizing someone. While doing so, our intentions should be pure. When we give suggestions, we should not have any ego. If we don't have an ego associated with our suggestions, we would not have a problem when our suggestion are not followed. However, if your suggestion is not followed in a matter that deals with halal and haram or permissible and impermissible, then voice your concern at the right platforms again. Raise with those who are above in rank than your ameer if you are not able to resolve the issue locally. If that doesn't help either, then you have the right to separate your ways. While doing so, make a dua for the organization and leave on a good note. Also make sure that you are not doing this because of ego. However, if the matter is trivial or does not deal with halal and haram, your responsibility is over when you have voiced your concern; then, there is no blame on you. There is no point in creating a fuss and causing division in organization based in such cases.

Regarding those who are at the receiving end of suggestions, they should listen to suggestions with an intention to consider them. It should not be like a suggestion box with a shredder at the end.

PART 8: NAJWA



أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۖ مَا يَكُونُ مِنْ نَجْوَى ثَلَاثَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ رَابِعُهُمْ
وَلَا خَمْسَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ سَادِسُهُمْ وَلَا أَدْنَىٰ مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْثَرُ إِلَّا هُوَ ۚ مَعَهُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كَانُوا ثُمَّ يُنَبِّئُهُم
بِمَا عَمِلُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

Do you not see that Allah knows whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth? If three converse privately, He is their fourth. If five, He is their sixth. Whether fewer or more, He is with them wherever they may be. Then, on the Day of Judgment, He will inform them of what they have done. Surely Allah has (perfect) knowledge of all things.

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ نُهُوا عَنِ التَّجْوَى ثُمَّ يَعُودُونَ لِمَا نُهُوا عَنْهُ وَيَتَنَاجَوْنَ بِالْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَمَعْصِيَةِ الرَّسُولِ وَإِذَا جَاءُوكَ حَبَّوْكَ بِمَا لَمْ يَحْثِكَ بِهِ اللَّهُ وَيَقُولُونَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ لَوْلَا يُعَذِّبُنَا اللَّهُ بِمَا نَقُولُ ۚ حَسْبُكُمْ جَهَنَّمُ يَصْلَوْنَهَا ۚ فَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ

Have you not seen those who were forbidden from secret talks, yet they (always) return to what they were forbidden from, conspiring in sin, aggression, and disobedience to the Messenger? And when they come to you (O Prophet), they greet you not as Allah greets you, and say to one another, “Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?” Hell is enough for them—they will burn in it. And what an evil destination!

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا تَنَاجَيْتُمْ فَلَا تَتَنَاجَوْا بِالْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَمَعْصِيَةِ الرَّسُولِ وَتَنَاجَوْا بِالْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَى ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ

O believers! When you converse privately, let it not be for sin, aggression, or disobedience to the Messenger, but let it be for goodness and righteousness. And fear Allah, to Whom you will (all) be gathered.

إِنَّمَا التَّجْوَى مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ لِيَحْزُنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَلَيْسَ بِضَارِّهِمْ شَيْئًا إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ

Secret talks are only inspired by Satan to grieve the

believers. Yet he cannot harm them whatsoever except by Allah's Will. So in Allah let the believers put their trust.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ تَقَسَّحُوا فِي الْمَجَالِسِ فَافْسَحُوا يَفْسَحِ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَإِذَا قِيلَ
انْشُرُوا فَانْشُرُوا يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

O believers! When you are told to make room in gatherings, then do so. Allah will make room for you (in His grace). And if you are told to rise, then do so. Allah will elevate those of you who are faithful, and (raise) those gifted with knowledge in rank. And Allah is All-Aware of what you do.

(Quran 58:7-11)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SESSION

This session is about something which very swiftly destroys the Islamic work - Najwa. Najwa is mentioned a couple of times in the passage from Surah Mujadilah that has been quoted above. Considering the great harms this brings, it is very important to uncover this concept with reasonable detail and elaborate the expected behaviour from the Muslim volunteer workers.

WHAT IS NAJWA AND HOW DOES IT DESTROY THE SHURA

Before we start any further discussion, let's talk about the essence of najwa. Najwa means 'secret discussions with malicious intentions'.

Essentially in any organization, there is a tendency for sub-groups to develop. Let us suppose that there are six people in a committee and three of them are very close friends. So these six people meet every week and three of them, being close friends, go for dinner afterwards. During the dinner, they discuss the same things that were discussed in the meeting and share more opinions about it. What happens then is that you have a sub-group forming within the main group, because they discuss a lot more with each other and their opinion becomes solid. So when they come to the meeting, they already have a single opinion and they are very defensive about that. Anything that comes up against their way or opinion, they deflect it. So they have become a lobby. What this does is that it disperses the unity and frankness of the gathering and of the decision-making process. It cuts away at shura (mutual consultation) because in shura everybody has an equal access to give an opinion and everybody shares their opinion on the same platform. They do not meet afterwards or form blocs on the outside. If such a bloc does get formed outside the forum, it is called najwa. The linguistic meaning of najwa is to get away from or escape from the main body and become an independent entity. So a private

meeting for malicious or evil purposes is what najwa is.

SOME PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF NAJWA AND EVIL ASSEMBLIES

The najwa is catastrophic for any Islamic work. It can destroy the Islamic school, the masjid, a dawah effort or an Islamic organization. When a few people discuss things which they should not discuss outside the forum, they are breaking the trust; the organization meetings, shura forums and what is discussed in them is a form of trust. Those who take them to where they don't belong, they are doing the 'najwa'. So, najwa violates that trust. For example, there's a masjid and its committee or board is discussing whether or not they should build a gym; so they organize a meeting. Everyone on the board is giving an opinion and there are discussions going on. But when the meeting is over, four people on the board get together at one of the guy's houses and they start discussing about what went on in the meeting and say things like, 'Why are they spending so much money on a gym? Who comes anyway? What about the insurance? What about this? What about that?' They said none of those things when they were in the meeting which was the place to say them. The fact that you have an opinion or a concern means it should be said at the meeting and that is shura. If you don't open your mouth there, then you shouldn't open your mouth anywhere else.

Having done the najwa, you come in the next meeting all angry; this is because if one person is upset and they talk to another person, the anger is not doubled, it's squared. It is exponentially worse.

NAJWA TURNS SMALL PROBLEMS INTO BIG ISSUES

Let's understand this with an example. Let's suppose two people are talking about a khutbah and one says, 'You know the khateeb said something I really do not understand', or 'I wasn't comfortable with what he said.' Up until then it was just a minor thing but if four people start discussing it, by the end of it, the poor khateeb is already labelled as a 'deviant' in most cases. It was a small problem; but when four or five people discuss a small problem in an inappropriate manner, it becomes a big problem. It becomes a huge deal and this is essentially what najwa does. It allows for small issues that can be dealt with very easily to grow out of proportion and turns them into very big issues. Shura is not only who you discuss with, but also WHEN you discuss. There's a time and a place to give your opinion.

EXAMPLE OF NAJWA OF MUNAFIQOON

Now in the Prophet ﷺ case, there used to be a few classes of people in his gathering. Most were true Muslims; but there were also some weak Muslims and the hypocrites. The latter

didn't open their mouths when the Prophet ﷺ was talking. When he was done, then they gathered with others and started their evil talk. 'Hey, what did he just say? What's he talking about?' So, right after the meeting, they started undermining what the Messenger ﷺ just said in the meeting. Right after the halaqa! This is najwa. This is massively destructive to the Islamic work.

HOW TO DEAL WITH NAJWA

This is something you should never be a part of. If you are the guy that's starting it, stop it immediately. If you are the guy innocently standing there listening to it, stop listening and walk away. Don't hang around; don't be a part of it!

IS THERE ANYTHING CALLED 'GOOD NAJWA'?

Before elaborating the passage from Surah Majadillah which is the central theme of this section, let's see if there can be any benefits of najwa in certain situations.

A few years before the above verses came down, it was revealed in Surah Nisa:114 that, "There's no good in the Najwa that they do.' Meaning that most of the time when they have a secret meeting, no good comes out of it unless the intention of the secret meeting was to:

- take the good work further,

- to give charity,
- to make reconciliation between the people or
- some other good intention.

Remember, these are the exceptional situations in which Najwa may be accepted; however, this is not the general rule. So if you are doing najwa don't assume it's a 'good najwa'. Its probably not. But here's an example of a good najwa.

The masjid committee decides that, 'We should build a gym at this Masjid. We should have a fundraiser next month.' It's all agreed upon. Then three of you get together over ice cream and you decide, 'Hey, before the fundraiser starts, let us put \$5,000 each and let's just get it rolling.. just the three of us for the sake of Allah. Let's just do it ahead of everybody else.'

Or, after a meeting, you noticed one guy was particularly angry and a few of you get together and you decide to speak to this brother. 'Brother we love you; we are in this together.' He says, 'No, but they do not listen to me or my opinion; I keep telling them but they never listen. Why should I be in the Shura? Why did they make me a member if they don't listen to me?' 'Bro, look, we love you. We value your opinion and more than that Allah values your opinion and Allah knows you are sincere. We want you to come. We don't want you to be angry. Anger is from the shaytan.' He replies, 'Yeah, 'I guess you are right', and then he agrees to resolve differences.

That's good najwa. The decision was already made. You didn't go and undermine that decision. You propelled that decision further, and you gave it more momentum. That's good Najwa which puts out fires, not starts them.

So, in general, you should refrain from najwa; however, if you do it based on situation or circumstances at hand, it should better be what can be called 'good najwa'. If it has the potential of turning into a bad thing, stay away from it. Don't go near it; no matter what. So many verses of the Quran are dedicated to this thing. This isn't a small or insignificant matter. Allah did not mention it just once, but repeatedly.

LET'S NOW UNPACK THE PASSAGE FROM SURAH MUJADILLAH THAT DEALS WITH NAJWA

'Have you not considered that Allah knows what is in the heavens and what is on the earth? There is in no private conversation between three but that He is the fourth of them, nor are there five but that He is the sixth of them - and no less than that and no more except that He is with them [in knowledge] wherever they are. Then He will inform them of what they did, on the Day of Resurrection. Indeed Allah is, of all things, Knowing. Have you not considered those who were forbidden from private conversation, then they return to that which they were forbidden from and converse among themselves about sin and aggression and disobedience to

the Messenger?' (58:7-8)

NAJWA LEADS TO ANIMOSITY AND PLUCKS THE BARAKAH OUT

The next part of the verse says, 'They keep holding secret gatherings that add to sin and animosity.' This is because when you have najwa, the grip of your bloc becomes tighter and you develop a natural animosity towards the other members. This is what happens in most masjid elections across the country and so on. It is very sad. And then we wonder why there is no barakah in our masajids or organized efforts! There are some masajid, when you walk into them you feel, 'it's not a real masjid'. On the other hand, when you walk into a blessed masjid which is free from such sinful acts in the background, you also know it and feel it. When you walk into a masjid that is bankrupt from barakah you will feel nothing inside your heart; it'll be just a building. The goodness is sucked out of it. Najwa is one of those things that suck the goodness out of a masjid or any Islamic project. It just plucks the barakah out.

This, unfortunately, has become the scene of many Islamic organizations that are undercutting one another. Dirty politics and murky elections and so on! Why are they holding secret meetings and asking people to vote for them? What are they doing? We are in this work for Allah. That's it. There should be

no other aim. If we are not given the opportunity to serve in one organization, it does not mean that we can't serve in other organizations or projects.

DON'T GET HUNG UP ON TITLES

If we are not given certain position or title within the organization, it does not mean that we cannot work for that organization. Don't let us get hung up on our titles like, 'president', 'chairman of the board of directors', 'department in-charge' and so on. Once we start going after titles, we start becoming proud and think all good things come from us; and if it's not from us, it can't be good. What will we get out of titles and positions? There's a better title: 'Abd-Allah'. It's available and we can take it. We don't have to be this or that; we don't have to vie for it. Everybody can have it.

I go to masjids across the country and in every masjid I come across 2-3 people who say, 'I started this Masjid all by myself, Alhamdulillah. All praise belongs to Allah but nobody was here when I started this masjid.' Yes, except the other two who also started this masjid 'by themselves'.

NAJWA LEADS TO UNDERMINING THE LEADER

Now in these ayat, we have to understand that the role of the Messenger ﷺ was not just as a Messenger but as the head of an organization; some of his followers, i.e. the munafiqeen,

were undermining his position as the head.

The guidance we are getting in these verses is that when these people get together, they start demoralizing him and when they get to the meeting, they mock him so that he may look bad. "Then they greet you with what Allah did not greet you with." Allah greets the Messenger ﷺ with salaam . But they say, As'saamu-alaikum,' which means, 'Death be upon you.' The other possible meaning of the ayah is that they say Salaam but they don't mean Salaam. It's like answering the greeting in such a way that you give a look of death. That's not salaam and that's not peace. So, when they greet with the insincere greetings or curse the Prophet ﷺ and see that no punishment came upon them and no lightning struck them, they say 'how come Allah did not punish us for what we say?' If he really was a Messenger, we would have been obliterated the moment we insulted him. What kind of a Messenger is this?'

Do you see that it all started with najwa and it ended up with them losing their imaan!! In that meeting, deep down inside they said words of Kufr.

"The only thing enough for them is hell and what a horrible place that is."

"Those of who you who have imaan, when you are alone in a secret meeting then do not hold a meeting full of sin and

animosity and disobedience to the messenger; instead have a meeting that leads to goodness and taqwa. Be mindful of Allah, for you will be herded towards him. Verily najwa is from Shaytan."

That entire secret assembly, that entire secret meeting, that sub-meeting in the car parking lot, that's from Shaytan. It's only there to cause grief. You see the twelve people held a meeting and everybody agreed. Everybody made dua afterwards. The meeting is done. As you are leaving, you notice the three trouble makers are standing in the parking lot in the corner and talking and pointing fingers and you think, 'I can sense trouble there.'

Yes, it's true; they can cause grief. But others shouldn't be too worried. They are not going to be harming them at all except by the permission of Allah. Just like in shura, we put our trust in Allah. The same way, when there is the problem of najwa, we still put our trust in Allah.

A SOLUTION TO DEAL WITH THE TROUBLEMAKERS

Now comes one of my favorite parts of the ayat that deals with solving the problem of najwa.

When people come as a bloc, what immediately comes to mind? Troublemakers. Do they come to the meeting early or late? They come late. They have their little meeting and they

take their sweet time in coming and when they come, they sit at the back. And when they sit at the back, they sit together. When the Ameer is speaking, they whisper to each other and they think nobody can hear them whisper. The ameer says something and you hear their noises from the back – the whole meeting is disturbed. They come late; they sit in the back and they cause disturbance. They don't have genuine concerns or comments, but they have complaints and snickers, condescending and dismissive comments. So Allah revealed a solution for the meetings of the Prophetﷺ.

The munafiqoon used to sit in the back and they used to make trouble and disturb the whole meeting. By the way, can that still happen now? Yeah, definitely it can! So Allah says, 'Those of you who have imaan, when it is said to spread out in a meeting, spread out; meaning when the meeting is about to be held, don't sit next to each other. So you are spread out like a checkerboard. So when the few trouble makers walk in they cannot sit together they have to sit in-between people like Umar (R.A.) and Hamza (R.A) and other sahaba. A puny little munafiq cannot make the disturbing noises anymore because Umar (R.A.) will grab him by the neck and teach a lesson. The munafiqeen cannot make trouble anymore because they are all spread out. 'May Allah spread you out', meaning may Allah swt diversify you.

And when it is said to you, 'Leave', you should Leave. Don't stop in the parking lot. Don't eat shawarma or have a cup of tea at PC, Punjab Chai shop or somewhere else and talk about the meeting. Don't do it. Just leave once the meeting is done. No socializing after the meeting because it's an amanah or trust. Shayatan will come and make you discuss the meeting and it'll quickly turn into najwa. So just leave.

This is Quran's guidance for meetings. Do you know there are masjids in our country which have lawsuits in courts that started out of discussions in parking lots! If only we had followed Allah's advice, we could have saved ourselves from so much trouble. We forget that Allah wants us to lessen our burden, so he gives us such advice. Allah is not burdening us. Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees. And Allah is all-aware of what you do. The angels will be making dua for you because you fought the forces of Shaytan by avoiding unnecessary socializing that can lead to big trouble for your community. And Allah is in full view of what you are up to.

USE THIS COURSE AS AN ORIENTATION OF WORKERS OF ISLAMIC ORGANIZATIONS AND COLLECTIVE EFFORTS

These aspects of collective guidance should be used for members of Shura or organizational forums, especially new ones before they start any collective work. I know we get the

orientation about the timing, the agenda and the minutes but these are all administrative orientations. We also need spiritual orientation for our voluntary workers. And this can save us a lot of trouble. This sort of course should be repeated every few months because we, as human beings, forget very easily.

The next session is about leadership in Muslim organizations.

Chapter summary:

This chapter deals with the concept of najwa – secret gatherings. When a sub-group is formed within the organization as a forward bloc and they pre-decide the things before coming to meetings, or meet afterwards and do out-of-the-forum discussions about the matters discussed on the forum. These discussions often include backbiting, create animosity within the organization, and often lead to undermining the leader. This can be extremely damaging for an Islamic organization and must be avoided.

However, there are some acceptable forms of najwa too. Those types of najwa do not undermine the leader or the decisions made on the forum. Rather, they encourage additional charity, reconciliation between the people and so on. We have to realize that no secret conversation is secret enough for Allah. We should accordingly make sure that if at all we go on the route to najwa, it should be one that is praiseworthy rather than the one that is to be blamed.

PART 9: LEADERSHIP



قَالَ اجْعَلْنِي عَلَى خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلَيْمَ

[Yusuf A.S.] said, "Appoint me over the storehouses of the land. Indeed, I will be a knowing guardian." (Quran 12:55)

وَاصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُم بِالْعَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ وَلَا تَعْدُ عَيْنَاكَ عَنْهُمْ تُرِيدُ زِينَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا تُطِعْ مَنْ أَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَهُ عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُهُ فُرْطًا

And keep yourself patient [by being] with those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, seeking His countenance. And let not your eyes pass beyond them, desiring adornments of the worldly life, and do not obey one whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance and who follows his desire and whose affair is ever [in] neglect. (Quran 18:28)

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَاكَ سَبْعًا مِّنَ الْمَتَانِي وَالْقُرْآنَ الْعَظِيمَ

And We have certainly given you, [O Muhammad ﷺ], seven of the often repeated [verses] and the great Qur'an.

لَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَخَفَضْ جَنَاحَكَ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Do not extend your eyes toward that by which We have given enjoyment to [certain] categories of the disbelievers, and do not grieve over them. And lower your wing to the believers. (Quran 15:87-88)

وَخَفَضْ جَنَاحَكَ لِمَنِ اتَّبَعَكَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

فَإِنْ عَصَوْكَ فَقُلْ إِنَّي بِرِيءٍ مِّمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى الْعَزِيزِ الرَّحِيمِ

الَّذِي يَرَاكَ حِينَ تَقُومُ

وَتَقَلُّبَكَ فِي السَّاجِدِينَ

إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

And lower your wing to those who follow you of the believers. And if they disobey you, then say, "Indeed, I am disassociated from what you are doing." And rely upon the Exalted in Might, the Merciful, Who sees you when you arise And your movement among those who

prostrate. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Knowing.

(Quan 26:215-220)

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ
وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

So by mercy from Allah , [O Muhammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah . Indeed, Allah loves those who rely [upon Him].

(Quan 3:159)

In this section, some of the essential qualities of leadership are being discussed.

BEING TRUSTWORTHY AND FIT-FOR-JOB

The first ayat mentioned in this section belongs to Surah Yusuf.

Yusuf (A.S.) come out of prison as a result of his supreme ability to interpret the dreams. When he was brought before the king, not only did he establish his innocence but he actually

presented his resume; Yusuf (A.S.) asked for the job, but wasn't given what he had asked for. He said, 'Make me the treasurer. I would like to be the treasury secretary of Egypt', and here's why: 'Innee Hafeezun Ameen.' I am 'Hafeez' and 'Ameen', i.e. I'll guard this responsibility, I'll take it seriously, I'll be honest about my job and I know what I am doing. The current guys around you (i.e. the king) are incompetent. They will make a mess of this issue of famine that is coming soon and it will create a fiscal crisis; people will die in large numbers because of this. So, I need to take care of this business and I am qualified to handle it.'

What we learn from this is that there is no harm in raising your hand up if you are truly the most skilled person for taking certain job or position for the task at hand provided that you have the pure and correct intentions.

HAVE A RIGHT LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE

Leadership is essentially about confidence. Having Too little, it's not leadership! Too much of it, you have arrogance! But before you take up a leadership role, you need to understand that you and I are essentially 'abd' or 'slaves' to Allah SWT which is the lowest position one can have. But, when you realize that Allah has given you certain talents and abilities, then it is your duty, as a slave, to use those talents to the best of your abilities. And if that means you have to take a position

of leadership, so be it.

A FINE LINE BETWEEN CONFIDENCE AND ARROGANCE

If nobody is going to stand up and take the job, you have to take the job. That is not arrogance or greed but being true to what Allah has given you. Arrogance is when you are obsessed with holding your title or post and can't let it go. The motivation Yusuf (a.s) had for leadership was because it was going to save lives, not because he liked being the treasury secretary or minister of finance. He was not in it for the titles. He wanted to save lives. That's true leadership. Not being in it for its own sake but for the sake of providing a service. If you truly believe you have something to offer in leadership, raise your hand and let it be known.

LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS

Allah has created some of you natural born-leaders. If kids cut class when you cut class in school, you are a leader. If people go to the restaurant you suggest and don't go to any other, you are a leader. You have a personality that is charismatic. People look up to you, listen to you, and do what you say. You are a leader. If you have influence over the opinions of others, you are a leader. Allah has given leadership qualities to some people and not to others.

On the other hand, there are some of you who are not natural

leaders. Some of you are extremely good followers. You guys are like machines. And you should acknowledge and accept that as a gift from Allah SWT because the world doesn't just work on leaders. 'Too many chiefs and not enough Indians will lead to problems'. So the world needs good followers too.

Some of you are neither followers nor leaders. You guys need to find yourself a place and fit somewhere.

WHAT MAKES YOU FIT FOR LEADERSHIP ROLE?

The qualities which Yusuf (A.S.) described about himself to justify his leadership role were being 'Hafeez' and 'Ameen' - i.e. He would guard and take care of his role seriously and he knew what he's doing. Here, sincerity is implied. If you are a slave of Allah, sincerity does not have to be talked about because it is understood. It is the foundation for all actions.

So, to be a leader you to have to have two things (in addition to utmost sincerity):

- a very serious attitude and ability towards the job &
- knowledge of the job.

So religious fervour, piety, level of Islamic learning, being extremely religious or righteous or being a hafiz of Quran, don't qualify you as a leader on their own. You may be an extreme 'zahid' who makes dua for hours and hours, but that

does not mean you are automatically a leader too; because, as mentioned before, leadership's two essential requirements are 'sincerity with the job' and 'knowledge of the job'.

Abu Zar Ghifari R.A. was such a spiritually-elevated companion that the Prophet ﷺ compared his spirituality to the spirituality of Isa (A.S.). Was he given a leadership position? No. The Prophet ﷺ instead gave it to Saad Ibn Abi Waqas R.A. who was an eighteen year old young boy, but a natural leader. This was because the Prophet ﷺ saw people for what they were. And that's another quality of true leader.

RECOGNIZING LEADERS

The ability to recognize and pick a leader from your flock, 'allocating Talent', is an essential leadership trait. True leaders can pick genuine potential in people and coin leadership to them at the right time and for the right opportunities. That's not just leadership, but also a part of management. People do masters degrees and PhDs in human resource management to learn these aspects. But we have all of this and so much more in the Sunnah of our beloved master Messenger ﷺ. What an amazing human resource allocator! When he says, 'Abu Bakr! Lead the Salah,' and he himself prays behind him, he's producing a future leader!

TWO TYPES OF SUPPORT REQUIRED BY ORGANIZATIONS:

For most Islamic works and collective efforts, there are two kinds of supports required:

- The volunteers for an organization
- Financial, social, advertising and other similar supports that usually come from the donors or from some already established and known figure who is going to come and give your organization a boost.

In the case of the Prophet ﷺ, he had got the sahabah who were his untiring and fully devoted volunteers.

With regards to the second type of support to the mission, he was hoping, and striving hard, for someone from the leadership of the Quraish to become Muslim considering it would give Islam a huge boost. If even one celebrity from Makkah would become a Muslim, it would contribute to the cause very positively. How much help did we get from Umar R.A. or Abu Zar Ghafari R.A. becoming Muslims? It was a big deal.

So, as leaders, you can look for and strengthen both these types of supports.

VOLUNTEERS: MOST IMPORTANT ASSETS

Now let us ponder on verse 28 from Surah Kahf which we mentioned at the beginning of this section and understand

the fine balance that needs to be maintained while applying the above-mentioned point.

The verse tells us, 'You remain patient with those who call upon their Master day and night; they only want his face; they only want to see Allah.' As for the Sahabah, they were very poor. Allah instructs the Prophet ﷺ, 'don't allow your eyes to turn away from them. Don't pay too much attention to leaders and make them accept Islam or get over-concerned about them'. Why was the Prophet ﷺ interested in celebrities or keynote figures? Because leaders have connections that influence masses and help spread the cause.

Now, look at it from another perspective. Allah SWT mentions about the Sahabah that they have a connection with Him and that should be enough for you. Day and Night, they are connected to Him. All they want to do is see His face. These are His people. 'Don't turn away from them.' That's the most valuable asset you have.

From the perspective of contemporary Islamic efforts and organizations, you should not be too impressed by the wealth and status of some that you think would give significant donations to your organization and cause a boost in one way or the other. Rather, sincere volunteers and sincere workers are the biggest assets you would ever have. Don't overlook this.

In the light of these verses, it is clear that being leaders, we have to value those ordinary but sincere workers, that are neither famous nor rich, but are ready to give every bit of their effort for you and your noble cause. You have to truly appreciate them.

As a leader, your job is very sensitive. You might not even realize it. People are always looking up to you and have an emotional attachment to you. So, Allah tells Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that if he pays too much attention to the wealthy, the ordinary Sahabah might start feeling unimportant and may think that rich people are more important. And if that feeling of “we are less valuable and they are more valuable” sets in, the work or the mission can be impacted significantly.

Allah swt sends these reminders even when the Prophet ﷺ did not even do that. But Allah is so concerned about the morale and motivation of the Sahabah that He doesn't leave this unhighlighted to Rasool ﷺ when it comes to even giving that impression. So much so, that He says to the Prophet ﷺ, 'Do you want the glitter of the worldly life?' What did the Prophet ﷺ want? Did he want this worldly life? Certainly not. Did he want kingship? Never was this his objective! He only wanted Islam to win in this world. But the way Allah said it, is almost like a warning to the Messenger ﷺ because his standards are the

highest. As a Messenger ﷺ, Allah swt defines standards for him which are way way way higher than us.

The same thing happens in Surah Abasa when a blind Sahabi came and the Prophet ﷺ frowned while he was busy with an important talk. Could he see the Prophet ﷺ frowning? No. If I frown at you and you can see it, you may get upset; but how is a blind Sahabi going to know that the Prophet ﷺ is frowning? Is he going to be offended? No. But the standard of leadership is so high that even the remotest possibility that you might make them feel unimportant will not go unnoticed by Allah. Allah swt immediately reminded the Prophet ﷺ.

What do we learn from this? The Sunnah of Prophet ﷺ as a leader and the Sunnah of Allah swt to perfect the Prophet's ﷺ leadership is that 'you give the highest regard to your volunteers'. To the ones who appear most insignificant - the ones who have no official backing or financial clout nor power. All they have to offer you is their sincerity and their dua or supplications to Allah. Those are your most important assets.

DON'T RUN AFTER SUPERSTARS

Superstars can be beneficial for the organizations; however, we should not overly value them and should not run after them at the cost of our sincere volunteers. The verses indicate as if Allah swt says, 'And let me tell you about the other guys

you are trying to impress, We have made them heedless of our remembrance. They follow only their desires.' What we learn from this is that those elites that we love to follow and impress may not be worth anything. Don't worry too much about them.

BE HUMBLE TO YOUR TEAM

Look at what Surah Hijr tells us,

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَاكَ سَبْعًا مِنَ الْمَثَانِي وَالْقُرْآنَ الْعَظِيمَ

And We have certainly given you, [O Muhammad ﷺ], seven of the often repeated [verses; i.e. Al-Fatiha] and the great Qur'an.

That's the wealth of believers. We have the Quran and we don't need to look for strength from anywhere else.

لَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَخَفِضْ جَنَاحَكَ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Do not extend your eyes toward that by which We have given enjoyment to [certain] categories of the disbelievers, and do not grieve over them. And lower your wing to the believers. (Quran 15:87-88)

So 'don't let your eyes turn towards some groups among them; Don't even look at their wealth, their strength or their

status.

Allah swt says, 'وَاخْفِضْ جَنَاحَكَ'. This is used in Arabic for a bird lowering its wings for its young. It's also used in Quran for showing respect to parents, meaning, be humble to parents.

But in these verses, the Prophet ﷺ is being told, 'be humble to the Sahabah who are following you.' The Prophet ﷺ is being told to be humble to the Sahabah, his team! Please hear me! It's not incorrect English. The ayah is not saying to the companions to be humble to the Prophet ﷺ. Allah is commanding his Prophet ﷺ to be humble to his followers. 'Whoever follows you from among the believers, be extremely humble to them! Be appreciative of them'. That's a command of Allah swt to His Messenger ﷺ. Don't look anywhere else; these are the people you have to be best to.

Let us now analyze ourselves. Look at how much we follow this command and how much compliant our leadership is to these values nowadays. Ameer sahib is yelling at everybody. People are scared of him. He's intimidating. He's not humble. He's not approachable. That's not the Sunnah of our Prophet ﷺ. Allah has reminded us to be careful about this aspect multiple times in the Quran. 'Lower your wings' is mentioned in Surah Shura again. 'Humble your wings to whoever follows you among the believers and if they disobey you, tell them I have nothing to do with what you are doing.' So long as you are

with me, I will be the humblest to you and if you leave my mission, I will say I have nothing to do with you. I am not going to be an authoritative figure over you. This is one of the hardest things to internalize.

DEALING WITH THOSE WHO GET ON YOUR NERVES

Then comes the jewel of it all. If you understand these next few verses, then you will understand what it means to be a leader in Islam! It is this one ayat that says it all:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا عَلِيظًا لَّقَلْبُ لَا تَقْضُوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

It is out of Allah's mercy that you (O Prophet) have been lenient with them. Had you been cruel or hard-hearted, they would have certainly abandoned you. So pardon them, ask Allah's forgiveness for them, and consult with them in (conducting) matters. Once you make a decision, put your trust in Allah. Surely Allah loves those who trust in Him. (Quran 3:159)

BE LENIENT WHEN ANGRY

The ayah starts with a beautiful attribute and an incredible unimaginable mercy from Allah – 'That you ﷺ are lenient towards them.' (لِنْتَ لَهُمْ).

We know that the Prophet ﷺ had a deep love for his uncle Hamza. We also know what happened at Uhud. An unintentional mistake and haste of some Sahabah resulted in the loss of seventy Muslim lives including the uncle of the Prophet ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ himself got injured. His tooth was damaged and there was a rumor spread that he'd been killed. The Muslims started giving up on the battlefield. Finally, he got up and then he had to make a retreat up the mountain. Many of the Muslims were fleeing here and other and not looking back at all. The messenger ﷺ was calling them from behind. Then Allah hit with calamity upon calamity, one on top of the other. This was a catastrophe. So when it's all over, does the Prophet ﷺ have the right to be really angry about this? Did he have a right to be extremely upset and angry with those few archers who left their position? It is very obvious that these Sahabah must have been feeling the guilt of their life. The Prophet ﷺ almost got killed, his uncle is martyred, and seventy Sahabah have been made Shaheed. A battle that was nearly won has been miserably lost. He should be extremely upset. Now they were waiting. The Prophet ﷺ was going to talk to them. Can you imagine the fear they must have had! And before the Messenger ﷺ had a meeting with them, Allah had a message for him ﷺ!

And Allah revealed to him, '(Wait!) it is by the special mercy of Allah that you are lenient towards them'. The Arabic word

for leniency, *Linta* comes from a word which means a sweet and soft date. Some dates are like a rock and there are other dates which melt in your mouth. So it means you are soft towards them and you are lenient. The Prophet ﷺ is about to go and express his frustrations therein and Allah says, 'It is by the special mercy of Allah that you are incredibly lenient towards these people.' Towards which people? Towards the ones you have a right to be angry about! Not because they failed some tiny little task you gave them; but because their mistake costed a number of Muslim lives including many key companions such as Mus'ab bin Umair because of whose teachings the people of Madinah learnt about Islamic before the migration of Prophet ﷺ from Makkah to Madinah, Hamza R.A., who was not only one of the uncles of the Prophet ﷺ but also his *radhai* brother. The archers were given explicit orders. It's not something small. The Prophet ﷺ had all the right to be very very angry. But Allah doesn't even say, 'don't be angry with them.' He says, 'It is by his special mercy that you are lenient or nice to them.' And He continues, 'had you been hard or tough-hearted with them, they would have ran away'. **فَطًّا غَلِيظًا الْقَلْبُ** means harsh or insensitive of the heart. Ghaleez means so tough that nothing penetrates it. So whatever excuses they make won't go inside your heart. So if you are tough or harsh or scolding when you meet them, they would disperse the same way as the pieces of glass move in every direction when it falls on floor. The spreading of the glass is

called 'infidaad' and this is the word that is used to describe the running away of the companions had the Prophet ﷺ been harsh-hearted. And if a glass breaks, can you recover it? No. Likewise, the sahabah would have run away and not come back.

A STANDARD REQUIRED OF LEADERS

Let's think about this for a second. We are talking about the people who laid their lives for Islam. They believed in the Quran. They knew it is a miracle in the Arabic language. They had full iman that this is the haqq or truth. And Allah says, had their leader been mean or full of anger, they would have run away from him, even if what the leader is saying is the truth.' That is, the best generation would have run away! It's a special mercy of Allah that you are so nice to them! That's leadership! That's the special expectation of the leadership and if you can't be nice and you can't be merciful, especially at the time when you are supposed be angry, then you are falling short of this standard.

We often hear today's leaders say things like, 'I am normally nice, but it's they who make me really upset'. Do they make you more upset than the archers at Uhud? Really? Do you have more right to be upset than the Prophet of Allah ﷺ had with them? What did your volunteers do? Did they leave their post at the top of the Masjid or something? Why are you so

angry? You don't have a licence for that! The Prophet ﷺ was asked not be angry with his team at the time when he nearly got killed, when the work of Islam almost came to an end, the mission came on the verge of failing. What you are facing is not more serious than that. Is the mistake of your volunteers more severe than the mistake of the archers? Allah says, 'You should be nice to them. You should not be harsh to them. They would have run away from you had you been hard-hearted.'

LOVINGLY FORGIVE YOUR TEAM FOR THEIR MISTAKES

And what we said above is not all. Allah gives more advice to the leaders regarding this. What should do before you meet them? Allah says, 'Lovingly forgive them. Lovingly pardon them. You go and say to them that 'it's ok; don't worry about it too much; I have got nothing against you'. Say that before they even apologise. Allah did not reveal an ayat in this passage telling the Sahabah that they should seek forgiveness; he, rather, revealed an ayat to the Prophet ﷺ to forgive them.

MAKE DUA FOR THEM

And that's not all. When you are done forgiving them, make dua for them in private that Allah may forgive them too. Not only do your forgive them but you make dua for them as well!! That will be the proof that you forgave them completely.

Because it's very hard to make dua for someone that you are angry at. It's very difficult to do it.

You, as a leader, have to make dua for your people. The ones that make you angry, you have to make istighfaar for them. That should be done in private and not in public so that it proves the genuineness in your concern for your team. It's not like the Sahabah are standing embarrassed in front of everybody and the Prophet ﷺ says, 'May Allah forgive you.' You should make sincere dua for them in private.

TRUST IN ALLAH SWT

The next part of the verse says, 'Then place your trust in Allah. No Doubt Allah loves those who place their trust in him.' The last part is also replete with important leadership lessons.

The Prophet ﷺ is the best decision-maker ever lived on the face of this earth. Allah says to the Prophet ﷺ that even though you should take consultation, at the end of the day you have the right to make your decision by yourself. But even then you shall not trust your own decision. You will need to put your trust in Allah. Because at the end of the day, whatever decisions we take, we don't know if they are good or bad. Even the Messenger ﷺ didn't know whether they are good or bad. You put your trust in Allah. Allah loves those who put their trust in him. Every time the Shura comes up, what else should keep

coming up? Tawakal or trust in Allah. Every time!

There is a strong relationship between giving opinion and trusting Allah. Allah is telling us, 'give your opinion based on your knowledge, experience, and sincerity, but you don't rely only on your opinion. Success and failure will not come because of your opinion or decision; Success and failure will come from Allah! Our reliance is upon Allah. That's a very important and heavy lesson to learn here. The Prophet ﷺ embodied all these morals and lessons in his perfect character and the leadership style. He was the Quran living and walking among the people. This is the leadership of the Prophet ﷺ - sensitive and concerned about the feelings of the Sahabah. The sahabah did not come and say anything; it was Allah Who Himself tended to their feelings .

THIS APPLIES TO YOU!!

These are qualities we have to instill in ourselves. This doesn't just apply when you are a general of an army with soldiers underneath you. Every member of a household, every head of a household is a leader. It also applies when you're a dad, a husband, an older brother and you have siblings under you, or when you are a grandfather, a father in law, or a mother in law. This applies to you too when you are an imam of the Masjid or a teacher at the Sunday school or at the Arabic class. You are a teacher with students who make you mad or

they will boil your blood. If you believe in these ayahs, you have to go make dua for them, not against them. For the one that made you mad, make dua for him. Islamic School teachers, listen up! The kid that crawls under your skin and his picture comes in your head and he's there winking at you, make dua for that kid. Not in front of everyone, like, 'May Allah help you and not make you a Shaytan,'. Not like that! But in your own privacy, you make dua for him.

I hope you can see why this is a golden ayah for Muslim leadership. It's about leadership in crisis situations because that's when leadership is proven. When your followers didn't follow you and everything has gone wrong, now what do you as a leader do! Now you turn to Allah's guidance. So we have to be people of confidence and competence. People of reliance upon Allah and people of the utmost mercy and courtesy to those that we are leading in every way shape or form.

AVOID IN-FIGHTING AND DISPUTES

I sincerely pray that Allah guides us and gives us the ability to apply these principles and gems of wisdom in our organizations, institutions, homes, and businesses that pave the way for us to build a strong future and a strong tomorrow. Currently there are so many disputes and problems in our masajid and institutions which is extremely sad. And when you

talk to people in a dispute, you realize that both sides mean well and they have good intentions but Shaytan comes in and causes dissent amongst them.

That's why we need this orientation over and over again - not just once, so that we can fix our intentions and mend those ties.

If you have had a fight in an organization, go give them a hug, apologise and start over again. We can't afford in-fighting and disputes. This fight is not worth it because we want to stand next to each other on the day of Judgment! I want you and your family to be in Jannah along with your other brothers and sisters; this quarrel is not worth it. These are just worldly things. It's not worth it at all. Let go these petty things. Don't hold onto them. Don't hold grudges. Go back to the organization you quit and make up.

May Allah cause unity amongst us, and unite us with our brothers and sisters. May Allah bless all organizations and volunteers and unite all of us on judgment day as believers in his shade.

Chapter summary

This chapter provides some excellent leadership lessons for the Muslim volunteers. A summary is provided below:

- If you have the right skill for a job and you have the knowledge and confidence to do it well, there is no problem in raising your hand for that. But do so with the purity of intentions. It should not be for the sake of titles but with an intention to make genuine contributions.
- There are some people who are born-leaders whereas others are extremely good followers. Both are required for the success of organization and the effort. The leaders should be identified and then assigned the right responsibilities. They should be coupled with a team that can support them achieve their goals.
- It can give boost to the effort or the organization if some key figures join the organization. But we should not over-value them or run after these people at the cost of our sincere volunteers.
- As leaders, we are required to be extremely humble to our team. We have to lower our wings to them and show them our genuine love and concern. They are our most valuable assets.

- When we are angry, we should be even more lenient. We should forgive our team members and even make dua for them. This is what we learn from the Seerah of our master Muhammad ﷺ.

PART 10: QUESTION AND ANSWERS



Note:

Following answers are modified transcript and may not be 100% representative of What Ustadh Noman Ali Khan said during the lecture. For further detail and exact wording, refer to Australian Islamic Library's website for accessing the complete lecture series or listening to its audios.

GUIDELINES FOR SISTERS

Q. WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ABOUT SISTERS SHARING THEIR KNOWLEDGE IN THE MASJID VICINITY, GIVING A TALK LIKE TODAY'S? CAN WOMEN TAKE A LEAD IN DOING WORK FOR THE SAKE OF ALLAH AND NOT BE PREVENTED FROM THAT?

If you have got something productive and positive to do, do it. Nobody is stopping you. Sisters should do their own programmes. I don't see anything wrong with that. I actually encourage it. I feel we should have our sisters as public role-models for our young girls, because there are more than

enough Disney role-models for them.

Honestly, I was at a programme where Irshaad Banji was speaking. She claims to be a Muslim. Allah knows what is in her heart but from her actions and speech it is obvious that it is not conventional Islam. But you know after she spoke, a couple of little girls in Hijab went over to her to get her autograph. You know why? Because she is apparently a Muslim and she's a public figure, so she must be a role-model. That was disturbing. We need to have role-models for our girls and we need to develop strong tarbiyah for our daughters at home. So that when they come out of home and go to college or to wherever they are going to go in their lives, they guard their haya and they know how to be strong and confident women.

Our deen does not want our women to be not in the workplace or whatever. Musa (a.s) saw a couple of girls that were herding sheep - but they knew how to handle themselves. They waited for the men to finish as they didn't want to mix with them inappropriately and get pushed and shoved. Then, when Musa (a.s) went up to them to ask them, 'What is your problem? Why are you wrestling with these sheep?' They didn't go like, 'Hee hee, astaghfirullah'. They didn't do that. They talked to him straight and they were tough. Remember, Musa (a.s) was a big man and they both said, 'We cannot feed our sheep until those men are done

and, by the way, our dad is a big sheikh!' So they were tough and they were out in the workplace, as mentioned in Surah Al-Qasas.

I recently met sheikh Akram Nadwi from Oxford. He has written a comprehensive book on the female collectors of hadith. It's called Al-Muhadithat. About three thousand women in the history of Islam that were muhadithat including some of the teachers of Imam Bukhari (rahimullah), Imam Muslim (rahimullah) and so on. He has compiled an entire composite list of these three thousand women that are the mothers of hadith study.

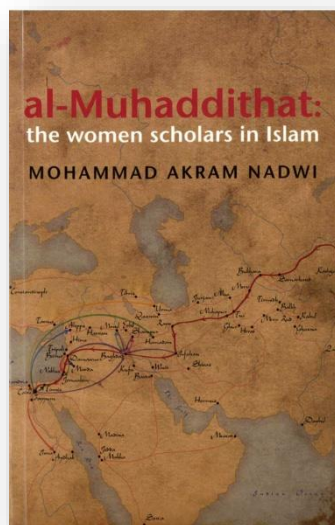


Figure 1: Title of the book Al-Mouhaddithat by Sheikh Akram Nadvi

It all proves one point - the Islamic scholarship is not something that was owned by men. Women were equally, if not even more, involved in it. This has always been the case. That is our tradition. But it is so very easy for us to have amnesia of our own history, subhanAllah!

PURITY OF INTENTIONS

Q. HOW SHOULD ONE DEAL WITH SINCERITY IN PUBLIC

SPEAKING?

You have to know yourself. You have to know why you are speaking. I accept that speaking can, many a times, turn into a performance. It can also turn into theatrics if you are not clear about who you are and why you are doing it. My personal remedy for this is based on a few things which are my own fixes for my sincerity:

1. I have close friends who have known me before I was known to people as I am today. They are not impressed with me and never will be. They know me for who I am. Those are some real friends. They are not my friends because I am a public figure. They are my friends because I played basketball with them back in the days and they can scold me. Such real friends keep us all in check. They keep us human. They do not sit next to you and say brother Nouman, I have a question. They do not do that. They directly say what they want to say and their advice carries a lot of weight.
2. The second thing is to have around you elders who are not impressed with you for your stature or your impressive speech or anything else. They too keep us in check and let us maintain our factor of humility. That is why our relationship with our parents

is so very important. It keeps us from being arrogant. As you get older, you will get older with what your mother and father have to say and you'll have to be patient. This is what keeps you humble. More than a shiekh, you need your parents. Go to your parents, sit with them, let your mum yell at you, let her tell how silly you look in your choice of clothing or how your hijab is not correctly done or whatever they want. Sit there and be quiet. That is a humbleness check. I am not saying my mum does that - she is a really nice - but it is really good to have sound relationship with your parents. So after you give a speech, go hang out with your mum or dad.

3. The final fix for me, personally, is itekalf (seclusion). You have to go to and find a place where nobody knows you. Don't give a talk when doing itekalf, don't give a halaqah, just go and be quiet. My such itekalf this year was hajj. No talks, no pictures, no meetings, nothing. I am just there to make hajj, that's it; not there to give speech. All I wanted was to disappear. I wanted to blend and that's all I wanted. And for da'ees especially, my advice is to do itekalf and go to umrah, but don't do that with the group, if possible. Don't take the pictures and post them on facebook straight away. Go by

yourself, it's your little secret between you and Allah.

WHICH ORGANIZATION TO WORK FOR

Q: WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ABOUT WORKING WITH THE TABLIGHI JAMAAT?

First of all, I respect all movements and jamaats and for the Tablighi Jamaat, I have tremendous respect. I also believe that going in the path of Allah takes different shapes and forms and that's one of such paths and ways of striving.

The whole point of the lecture series (on which this book is formed) was to encourage Muslim youth to be involved in at least something. The deen requires us to be concerned with more than just ourselves. It requires us to be concerned with others as well - in whatever capacity we can. So, inshaAllah, in whatever way that manifests itself, I would highly encourage you to get involved.

ADVICE FOR TEACHERS

Q. HOW DO I BALANCE KEEPING MY FOLLOWERS/STUDENTS DISCIPLINED WHILE APPLYING ALL THE NICE LEADERSHIP ADVICES YOU GAVE?

Some of the advices are universal and can be applied to the teacher-student relationship, but some of them don't.

The leadership advice is highly relevant to you as a teacher to apply, including the ability to be patient with students, working with them compassionately and finding the balance between courtesy and authority. This is because a leader at the end of the day does enjoy an authority. However, this authority has to be exercised in such a way that it does not feel unjustly authoritative.

The use of the word “ameer” in Arabic is very instructive in this regard. There are three words for this: “amir”, “ammar” and “ameer”.

- Amir is someone who gives commands to you.
- Ammar is someone who keeps telling what to do, and
- Ameer is someone who doesn't tell what to do, but people obey him anyway. It is an adjective which means they are in a position of authority but they don't have to open their mouth for people to obey them. This is what a real ameer is.

So by the linguistic definition, ameer means someone who doesn't give a lot of instructions but is followed anyway because of the respect he enjoys for his leadership. But developing that relationship of respect takes time. We should try to strike a balance between “becoming too lenient and friendly with students” and at the same time not “becoming

too harsh with them" either. There is a very thin line between these two aspects.

DO THE DAWAH WITH WISDOM

Q. WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO TALK TO OR ADVISE SOMEONE WHO MAY TAKE YOUR WORDS AS AN ATTACK ON THEIR BELIEFS AND WAYS? IS DUA THE BEST OPTION THEN TO HELP THEM OUT?

Telling somebody about what wrong they are doing, especially if it is to some family members, you have to be direct but subtle. You have to be honestly tactful. It is undeniable reality that the truth does hurt in most cases. When you try to correct someone, people do get offended many a times.

Who could be nicer human being on the face of this earth than the Prophet ﷺ. Even his own family was extremely offended when he presented Islam to them. It just comes with telling the truth. People's feelings are hurt and they can get offended by what you have to say. But, in doing so, you should always maintain a respectful posture and avoid saying things over and over again. Find a good time to say it. If it works out, it works out; if it doesn't, just let it go. At times, it happens that when we say something to somebody, they do not respond right away or respond in a negative way. But what we don't realize in such situations is that the sincerely offered words do get stuck in their minds and it takes them a year, six months or

whatever and then those same words that you said to them may click. Everybody works on their own clock. So you do whatever best you can do. Don't worry about changing people because that comes from Allah's will.

"Indeed you will not be able to guide whom you wish, but Allah guides those whom He will and He knows best those who receive guidance." (Al-Qur'an 28:56 Surah al-Qasas)

"Invite (all) to the Way of your Rabb (Cherisher and Sustainer) with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for your Rabb knows best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance." (16:125)

Q. IF YOU KNOW YOUR FAMILY IS DOING SOMETHING WRONG, HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO SAY THE TRUTH; OR SHOULD YOU KEEP YOUR SILENCE FOR THE SAKE OF FAMILY?

There is no such thing as keeping the family together by compromising on the truth. It's a myth. Actually speaking the truth is not going to destroy your family, unless it is a traumatic secret that the family is holding. In that case, one should better see a counsellor.

But if it is like your dad is into a haraam business and after a period of thinking and reflection, you manage to say one day, 'Dad isn't that a little haraam?', you may get yelled at, but

say it. At least it'll be off your chest. Say, 'Dad, you've got a lotto machine in the gas station, isn't that a little problematic? I mean I feel bad about it.' Or, 'You know we're eating halaal chicken from haraam money.' Slip it in get yelled at, slip it in again. Do not argue about it with your parents but you should speak the truth and take a beating, and speak the truth again. That's the formulae.

DEALING WITH NAJWA

Q. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE MSA LEADERS WHO ARE FACING BAD NAJWA IN THEIR SHURA OR FACING DIFFERING OPINIONS? HOW WOULD YOU DEAL WITH A SHURA PERSON WHO DOES NOTHING YOU ASK HIM TO DO?

Make them read this book or watch the video series on which it is based. Other than that, you cannot do much but be patient because these kinds of problems do exist. You just have to work through them.

It is important to choose your words carefully. Incorrectly chosen words can, not only, seriously destroy your working and personal relationships, but also put the progress towards cause in a serious jeopardy. It may not be a very good idea to tell them: 'I heard a lecture that this is najwa and according to Sura Maida people of Najwa burn in hell'. Rather, you have to be more tactful, respectful, and polite. If people within organisations talk to each other in this way then this becomes

personal, which is not encouraged at all. Wherever possible, we should try to depersonalize the message to avoid people getting defensive. For example, if you want to give some clear message to person not standing up to responsibilities, rather than saying “YOU need to listen to this”, you can say, “We all need to listen to this”. Criticisms, if not done in a proper manner, can become personal very quickly and turn ugly losing its core objective.

A LITMUS TEST FOR MODESTY

Q. HOW CAN WE BALANCE MIX-GENDER MSA AND NOT COMPROMISE OUR MODESTY AND NOT BE SHAMELESS?

I am going to do a whole programme on it called ‘shame’. It is about how the Quran talks about shame and where can it get compromised for Muslim youth who are apparently very religious and for those that are not so religious. More often than not, this would be a set of moral stances rather than fatwas. If you understand the moral guidelines and you can stick to them, you will be fine. But if you do not understand them, you may face problems.

As a rule of thumb, if you are explaining something to opposite gender or are engaged in a conversation, you should hold yourself up in a way that is honourable and respectful. Someone watching you from somewhere should not have any opportunity to misinterpret it. If it can be misinterpreted,

then you should not be in that situation. That is a kind of a litmus test that I suggest to people.

As far as conversations are concerned, if you are completely comfortable with having a conversation with a non-mahram in the exact same way as if your father was standing there and your tone wouldn't be any different and your body language or posture wouldn't be any different, the words you use wouldn't be any different, then go ahead. But if you think that your dad, your brother or your husband or grandfather or even if I am standing there and your tone, the way you carry yourself would get impacted, even a little bit, then you probably should not be in that conversation. These are good litmus tests.

It is not a fatwa but a simple litmus test for a common person. If you think you are not doing anything wrong, then why are you changing your behaviour when your dad is there? If it is not wrong, then why are you so ashamed of it? Why are you shocked by it? If anything is going wrong, your inner conscious will raise tell you about this when you do the litmus test.

MANAGING STRESS WHILE DOING ISLAMIC WORK

Q. AS A LEADER, HOW DO YOU OVERCOME THE STRESS OF YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES IN ORDER TO LEAD AN ORGANISATION (EFFECTIVELY)?

I get engaged in games, or play with my children, or sleep. When I wake up, I can deal with it again. We are all humans. We need a release. It may be basketball, or a punching bag at home and so on. For many people, it is dua or qiyam ul lail. Those are great, but if you are finding it difficult to do that regularly, then find some other healthy energy release.

But do not over-think about your role either. We should be concerned about our role without being paralysed by its stature or extent. Life is about moving on. Everybody has got problems and we all have a to-do list. If you take a piece of paper now and you make a list of things to do, it will probably be a very long one. And if you start thinking about getting all those things done, you may feel there is so much you have not got done. Or if you make a list of things you wanted to learn that you haven't learnt, you would get depressed. You just have to take one day a time and one problem at a time and not look at the whole list of things all the time.

What advice do the teachers give to kids doing hifz (memorization) of the whole Quran? They start with Juz Amma (30th Juz of Quran)! They start with two pages a day. The teachers say to their students, "don't worry about what you haven't done, worry about what you have done". Worry about the task at hand and not about all the other things, otherwise you'll get overwhelmed and you would not be able

to carry on.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND THE WORK OF DEEN

Q. WHEN WE SERVE A COMMUNITY AT LARGE FOR THE SAKE OF ALLAH, HOW TO HAVE A LOT OF SABR TO GRADUATE TO THE NEXT LEVEL? INDIVIDUALLY, HOW CAN WE HAVE FOCUS AND DEVELOP OUR DEEN ESPECIALLY WHEN WE SEE THAT WE ARE STRUGGLING WITH OUR WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

I personally believe that balance in the life of a Muslim comes from a familiarity and a regular study of the Quran; Quranic studies shouldn't just be an academic exercise. This is where the balance comes from. This book balances all of our priorities. It does not let you forget your obligations to Allah and to your community and keeps you spiritually under check.

I feel that the biggest crisis of the Muslim Ummah today is that we, at the communal level, are distant from the Quran. We don't have a personal relationship with it.

That is why I feel the talk I gave yesterday is very important. I usually do not feel any of my talks are too important, but I feel that one was. This was because I gave it with my own kids in mind trying to ponder over "How can I educate my kids with the Quran? How can I get them to have a deep, personal connection with the Quran? How are they going to do that?" This is what inspired that lecture.

Q. CAN I JUST SERVE MY PARENTS AND SPEND A LIFE IN SOLITARY AFFAIRS WITH JUST MY IMMEDIATE FAMILY AND RELATIVES?

Sure, why not? If you just want to work on your family and it keeps your hands full, then do not volunteer at the masjid or with an organization; just serve your parents and family while performing your obligatory duties.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF MAJOR SINS



(70 major sins, as compiled by Imam Shams ud Din Dhahabi)

VIOLATION OF COMMANDS OF ALLAH REGARDING THE MATTERS OF RELIGION AND PERSONAL OBLIGATIONS

1. Ascribing Associates To Allah, The Most High (Shirk)
2. Not Performing the Prayer
3. Breaking One's Fast During Ramadan Without an Excuse
4. Not Performing the Hajj When Able to
5. The Consumption of Haram
6. Not Freeing Oneself of All Traces of Urine
7. Suicide
8. Breach of Faith
9. Disbelieving in Destiny
10. Dragging the Hem of One's Garment Out of Conceit
11. Picture-making (or statue-making)

12. Slaughtering in Other Than Allah's Name
13. Men Wearing Silk or Gold
14. Feeling Secure From Allah's Devising
15. Despairing of the Mercy of Allah and Losing of Hope
16. Forgoing the Congregational Prayer to Pray Alone
Without A Legal Excuse
17. Constantly Missing the Friday and Congregational
Prayer Without A Valid Excuse

VIOLATION OF COMMANDS OF ALLAH THAT RESULT IN VIOLATION OF THE RIGHTS OF OTHER HUMAN BEINGS

18. Killing A Human Being (except for the reasons
permitted by the Shariah, e.g. as a legal punishment
from Islamic government etc.)
19. Sorcery
20. Not Paying Zakat (this act results in the poor not being
given their share from the wealth of the wealthy)
21. Showing Disrespect to One's Parents
22. Severing the Ties of One's Relatives
23. Adultery
24. Sodomy
25. Accepting Usurious Gain
26. Wrongly consuming an Orphan's Property
27. Lying About the Prophet
28. Fleeing From the Battlefield

29. The Leader Who Misleads His Followers, the Tyrant and the Oppressor
30. Arrogance, Pride, Conceit, Vanity and Haughtiness
31. Bearing False Witness
32. Drinking Alcohol
33. Gambling (Qimar)
34. Accusing a Woman of Adultery
35. Misappropriating Spoils of War, Muslim Funds or Zakat
36. Theft
37. Highwaymen Who Menace the Road
38. The Engulfing Oath
39. Taking People's Property Through Falsehood
40. Collecting Taxes unlawfully
41. Telling Lies
42. The Dishonest Judge
43. Bribery
44. Women Imitating Men and Vice Versa
45. The Pimp and the One Who Permits His Wife To Fornicate
46. Marrying Solely to Return to the Previous Husband
47. Showing off in Good Work
48. Learning Sacred Knowledge for the Sake of this World or Concealing It
49. Reminding Recipients of One's Charity to Them
50. Listening to the People's Private Conversations
51. The Talebearer Who Stirs Up Enmity Between People

52. Cursing Others
53. Breaking One's Promise or Pledge
54. Believing Fortune-tellers and Astrologers
55. A Wife's Rebellion Against Her Husband
56. Loudly Lamenting For the Dead or When Afflicted With
an Adversity
57. Excess Against Others
58. Overburdening and Arrogance Against Others
59. Hurting One's Neighbour
60. Hurting or Reviling Muslims
61. Harming the Servants of Allah
62. Fleeing of the Slave
63. Falsely Claiming Someone is One's Father
64. Arguing, Picking Apart Another's Words, and
Quarrelling
65. Withholding Excess Water From Others
66. Stinting When Weighing or Measuring Out Goods and
Similar Merchandise
67. Bringing Loss to the Bequest
68. Deception and Evil Schemes
69. Spying on the Muslims and Revealing Their
Weaknesses
70. Disparaging the Companions of the Prophet

